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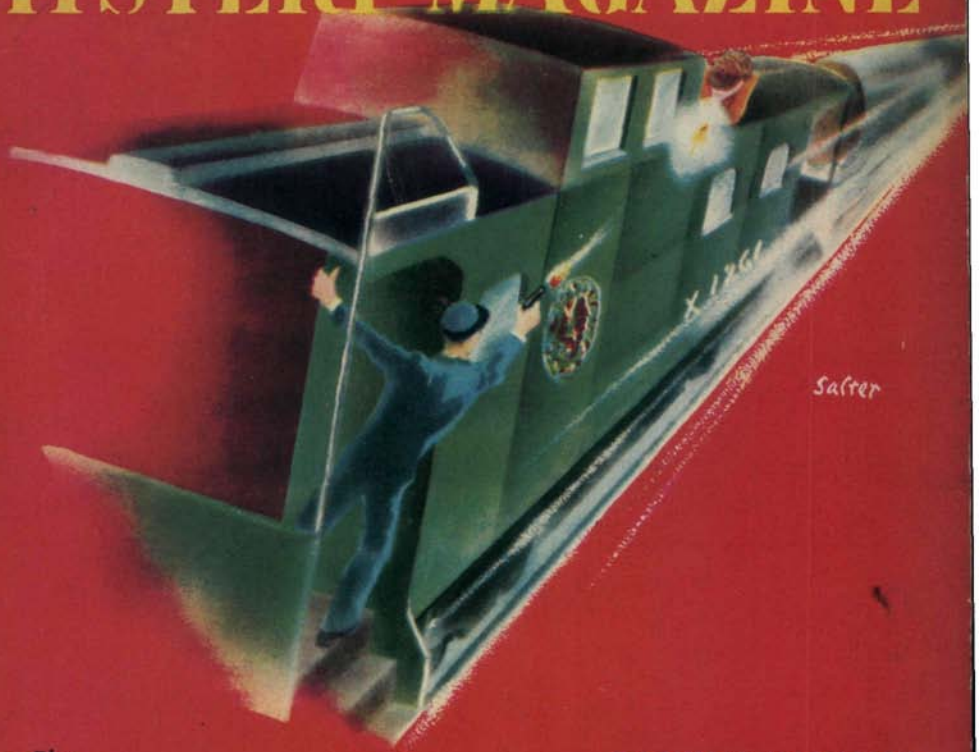

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Seventh

$6,000 SHORT STORY CONTEST

(again with the cooperation of Little, Brown & Co., of Boston)

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award the following: one (1) Award of Merit of $1,000; four (4) Second Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Third Prizes of $250 each. All prizes cover first American and Canadian publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates. It is understood that, while authors retain all radio and television rights, there will be no radio or television use of stories bought through this contest until the stories have been published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Mercury Publications, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1951.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by December 31, 1951. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1952.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When a writer needs a pseudonym, how does he go about selecting it? Blindfold, from a telephone book? By some esoteric system of numbers, or through anagrammatic shuffling and reshuffling? Or is there a special meaning in the origin of most pen-names? Yes, we think so: most pseudonyms are not the result of haphazard happenstance; usually they are chosen with care and carpentry. For example: Brett Halliday is one of the pen-names used by Davis Dresser. When Mr. D. wrote his very first mystery novel, he named the detective Halliday; the publisher, however, changed the name to Burke — they felt it was more "glamorous"; then when Mr. D. had his first Michael Shayne book accepted by another publisher (the first publisher and twenty-one others rejected the initial Shayne manuscript), Mr. D. needed a pen-name; so, for the Shayne series, he went back to his first love, Halliday, and for a first name — to make it Brett Halliday — he took the given name of the very publisher who had thought the name Halliday not glamorous enough for either a character or a writer!

Consider the case of Hugh Pentecost, pen-name of Judson P. Philips: Jud's middle initial — P — stands for Pentecost, his mother's maiden name; also, Jud had a great uncle, actually named Hugh Pentecost, who was a well-known lawyer in the New York of the 1890s. The original Hugh Pentecost's daughter (who is Jud's mother's first cousin) gave Jud permission to use the full name of Hugh Pentecost. It was, as Mr. P. says, "a sort of natural choice."

Take a leaf out of our own memory book: when we needed an alter-pseudonym, we decided that it should not seem to have any relationship whatever to the pen-name of Ellery Queen, yet it should have some remote connection — for those eagle-eyed aficionados who could make the connection. So, we went back into our first Queen book, THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY, *and picked out a name from that. If you will cast your eye down page x of the Foreword, in the original edition of* THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY, *you will find a reference to "the now-ancient Barnaby-Ross murder-case" in which, supposedly, Ellery Queen made his bow as his father's unofficial counsel; the name Barnaby Ross became the pseudonym*

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under which our four novels about Mr. Drury Lane were first published.

Richard W. Webb and Hugh C. Wheeler are known by quite a few pen-names — Q. Patrick, Patrick Quentin, Jonathan Stagge. Where did they come from? Well, Patrick is a combination of the first syllable of Mr. Webb's earliest collaborator, whose given name is Patsy, and the first syllable of Mr. W.'s nickname, Rickie — Pat plus Rick equals Patrick. The Q was thrown in "as the most intriguing letter in the alphabet" — at that time, Mr. W. hastens to explain, "it did not have the world-wide renown it has today in connection with Ellery Q." Later Mr. W. teamed up with the other Mr. W., and their joint output skyrocketed. They found themselves with too many books to be brought out under one name. So Simon and Schuster, their publishers, suggested that Q. Patrick simply be reversed to Patrick Quentin. Still later, the boys needed a third pen-name; since the first book under the third pseudonym had a hunting background, they chose the name Stagge, and preceded it with Jonathan because the two names made "a nice euphonious mouthful."

Now, did you know that Dashiell Hammett also wrote under a pen-name? Ah, there's a surprise! Yes, some of Hammett's earlier stories were published under the author's name of Peter Collinson. We asked Mr. H. where in the world and how in the hemisphere he got the name Peter Collinson; and Mr. H. explained: in the criminal slang of the 1880s and 1890s the name Peter Collins was lingo meaning "nobody"; so Mr. H. simply took Peter Collins' son's name for a nom-de-plume. . . .

"Arson Plus" — the third in the series of ten "new" Hammett stories to appear in EQMM during the balance of this year and most of next — is a Continental Op story which was first published under the name of Peter Collinson, and now appears under the name of Dashiell Hammett. This is not a unique occurrence in detective-story history — there have been other instances of short stories being published more than once, and each time under a different author's name. Some of Cornell Woolrich's stories have been credited to both Cornell Woolrich and William Irish on different appearances in print, and so have some of John Dickson Carr's shorts, which have been signed as by John Dickson Carr on some occasions, and as by Carter Dickson on other occasions.

But "by Peter Collinson" or "by Dashiell Hammett" or by-any-other-name, a ratiocinative rose is just as sweet. Join the Continental Op in a new rough-tough caper — the real McHammett!

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ARSON PLUS

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

JIM TARR picked up the cigar I rolled across his desk, looked at the band, bit off an end, and reached for a match.

"Three for a buck," he said. "You must want me to break a *couple* of laws for you this time."

I had been doing business with this fat sheriff of Sacramento County for four or five years — ever since I came to the Continental Detective Agency's San Francisco office — and I had never known him to miss an opening for a sour crack; but it didn't mean anything.

"Wrong both times," I told him. "I get them for two bits each, and I'm here to do you a favor instead of asking for one. The company that insured Thornburgh's house thinks somebody touched it off."

"That's right enough, according to the fire department. They tell me the lower part of the house was soaked with gasoline, but the Lord knows how they could tell — there wasn't a stick left standing. I've got McClump working on it, but he hasn't found anything to get excited about yet."

"What's the layout? All I know is that there was a fire."

Tarr leaned back in his chair, turned his red face to the ceiling, and bellowed:

"Hey, Mac!"

The pearl push-buttons on his desk are ornaments so far as he is concerned. Deputy sheriffs McHale, McClump, and Macklin came to the door together — MacNab apparently wasn't within hearing.

"What's the idea?" the sheriff demanded of McClump. "Are you carrying a bodyguard around with you?"

The two other deputies, thus informed as to whom "Mac" referred this time, went back to their cribbage game.

"We got a city slicker here to catch our firebug for us," Tarr told his deputy. "But we got to tell him what it's all about first."

McClump and I had worked together on an express robbery several months before. He's a rangy, tow-headed youngster of twenty-five or six, with all the nerve in the world — and most of the laziness.

"Ain't the Lord good to us?"

He had himself draped across a chair by now — always his first objective when he comes into a room.

"Well, here's how she stands: This fellow Thornburgh's house was a couple miles out of town, on the old county road — an old frame house. About midnight, night before last, Jeff Pringle — the nearest neighbor, a half-mile or so to the east — saw a glare in the sky from over that way, and phoned in the alarm; but by the

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time the fire wagons got there, there wasn't enough of the house left to bother about. Pringle was the first of the neighbors to get to the house, and the roof had already fallen in then.

"Nobody saw anything suspicious — no strangers hanging around or nothing. Thornburgh's help just managed to save themselves, and that was all. They don't know much about what happened — too scared, I reckon. But they did see Thornburgh at his window just before the fire got him. A fellow here in town — name of Henderson — saw that part of it too. He was driving home from Wayton, and got to the house just before the roof caved in.

"The fire department people say they found signs of gasoline. The Coonses, Thornburgh's help, say they didn't have no gas on the place. So there you are."

"Thornburgh have any relatives?"

"Yeah. A niece in San Francisco — a Mrs. Evelyn Trowbridge. She was up yesterday, but there wasn't nothing she could do, and she couldn't tell us nothing much, so she went home."

"Where are the servants now?"

"Here in town. Staying at a hotel on I Street. I told 'em to stick around for a few days."

"Thornburgh own the house?"

"Uh-huh. Bought it from Newning & Weed a couple months ago."

"You got anything to do this morning?"

"Nothing but this."

"Good. Let's get out and dig around."

We found the Coonses in their room at the hotel on I Street. Mr. Coons was a small-boned, plump man with the smooth, meaningless face, and the suavity of the typical male house-servant.

His wife was a tall, stringy woman, perhaps five years older than her husband — say, forty — with a mouth and chin that seemed shaped for gossipping. But he did all the talking, while she nodded her agreement to every second or third word.

"We went to work for Mr. Thornburgh on the fifteenth of June, I think," he said, in reply to my first question. "We came to Sacramento around the first of the month, and put in applications at the Allis Employment Bureau. A couple of weeks later they sent us out to see Mr. Thornburgh, and he took us on."

"Where were you before you came here?"

"In Seattle, sir, with a Mrs. Comerford; but the climate there didn't agree with my wife — she has bronchial trouble — so we decided to come to California. We most likely would have stayed in Seattle, though, if Mrs. Comerford hadn't given up her house."

"What do you know about Thornburgh?"

"Very little, sir. He wasn't a talkative gentleman. He hadn't any business that I know of. I think he was a retired seafaring man. He never said he was, but he had that manner and look. He never went out or had anybody in to see him, except his niece

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once, and he didn't write or get any mail. He had a room next to his bedroom fixed up as a sort of workshop. He spent most of his time in there. I always thought he was working on some kind of invention, but he kept the door locked, and wouldn't let us go near it."

"Haven't you any idea at all what it was?"

"No, sir. We never heard any hammering or noises from it, and never smelled anything either. And none of his clothes were ever the least bit soiled, even when they were ready to go out to the laundry. They would have been if he had been working on anything like machinery."

"Was he an old man?"

"He couldn't have been over fifty, sir. He was very erect, and his hair and beard were thick, with no gray hairs."

"Ever have any trouble with him?"

"Oh, no, sir! He was, if I may say it, a very peculiar gentleman in a way; and he didn't care about anything except having his meals fixed right, having his clothes taken care of — he was very particular about them — and not being disturbed. Except early in the morning and at night, we'd hardly see him all day."

"Now about the fire. Tell us the whole thing — everything you remember."

"Well, sir, my wife and I had gone to bed about ten o'clock, our regular time, and had gone to sleep. Our room was on the second floor, in the rear. Some time later — I never did exactly know what time it was — I woke up, coughing. The room was all full of smoke, and my wife was sort of strangling. I jumped up, and dragged her down the back stairs and out the back door, not thinking of anything but getting her out of there.

"When I had her safe in the yard, I thought of Mr. Thornburgh, and tried to get back in the house; but the whole first floor was just flames. I ran around front then, to see if he had got out, but didn't see anything of him. The whole yard was as light as day by then. Then I heard him scream — a horrible scream, sir — I can hear it yet! And I looked up at his window — that was the front second-story room — and saw him there, trying to get out the window. But all the woodwork was burning, and he screamed again and fell back, and right after that the roof over his room fell in.

"There wasn't a ladder or anything that I could have put up to the window for him — there wasn't anything I could have done.

"In the meantime, a gentleman had left his automobile in the road, and come up to where I was standing; but there wasn't anything we could do — the house was burning everywhere and falling in here and there. So we went back to where I had left my wife, and carried her farther away from the fire, and brought her to — she had fainted. And that's all I know about it, sir."

"Hear any noises earlier that night? Or see anybody hanging around?"

"No, sir."

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"Have any gasoline around the place?"

"No, sir. Mr. Thornburgh didn't have a car."

"No gasoline for cleaning?"

"No, sir, none at all, unless Mr. Thornburgh had it in his workshop. When his clothes needed cleaning, I took them to town, and all his laundry was taken by the grocer's man, when he brought our provisions."

"Don't know anything that might have some bearing on the fire?"

"No, sir. I was surprised when I heard that somebody had set the house afire. I could hardly believe it. I don't know why anybody should want to do that. . . ."

"What do you think of them?" I asked McClump, as we left the hotel.

"They might pad the bills, or even go South with some of the silver, but they don't figure as killers in my mind."

That was my opinion, too; but they were the only persons known to have been there when the fire started except the man who had died. We went around to the Allis Employment Bureau and talked to the manager.

He told us that the Coonses had come into his office on June second, looking for work; and had given Mrs. Edward Comerford, 45 Woodmansee Terrace, Seattle, Washington, as reference. In reply to a letter — he always checked up the references of servants — Mrs. Comerford had written that the Coonses had been in her employ for a number of years, and had been "extremely satisfactory in every respect." On June thirteenth, Thornburgh had telephoned the bureau, asking that a man and his wife be sent out to keep house for him, and Allis sent out two couples he had listed. Neither couple had been employed by Thornburgh, though Allis considered them more desirable than the Coonses, who were finally hired by Thornburgh.

All that would certainly seem to indicate that the Coonses hadn't deliberately maneuvered themselves into the place, unless they were the luckiest people in the world — and a detective can't afford to believe in luck or coincidence, unless he has unquestionable proof of it.

At the office of the real-estate agents, through whom Thornburgh had bought the house — Newning & Weed — we were told that Thornburgh had come in on the eleventh of June, and had said that he had been told that the house was for sale, had looked it over, and wanted to know the price. The deal had been closed the next morning, and he had paid for the house with a check for $14,500 on the Seamen's Bank of San Francisco. The house was already furnished.

After luncheon, McClump and I called on Howard Henderson — the man who had seen the fire while driving home from Wayton. He had an office in the Empire Building, with his name and the title *Northern California Agent for Krispy Korn Krumbs* on the door. He was a big, careless-looking man of forty-five or so, with the professionally jovial smile that

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belongs to the traveling salesman.

He had been in Wayton on business the day of the fire, he said, and had stayed there until rather late, going to dinner and afterward playing pool with a grocer named Hammersmith — one of his customers. He had left Wayton in his machine, at about ten thirty, and set out for Sacramento. At Tavender he had stopped at the garage for oil and gas, and to have one of his tires blown up.

Just as he was about to leave the garage, the garage man had called his attention to a red glare in the sky, and had told him that it was probably from a fire somewhere along the old county road that paralleled the State Road into Sacramento; so Henderson had taken the county road, and had arrived at the burning house just in time to see Thornburgh try to fight his way through the flames.

It was too late to make any attempt to put out the fire, and the man upstairs was beyond saving by then — undoubtedly dead even before the roof collapsed; so Henderson had helped Coons revive his wife, and stayed there watching the fire until it had burned itself out. He had seen no one on that county road while driving to the fire. . . .

"What do you know about Henderson?" I asked McClump, when we were on the street.

"Came here, from somewhere in the East, I think, early in the summer to open that breakfast cereal agency. Lives at the Garden Hotel. Where do we go next?"

"We get a car, and take a look at what's left of the Thornburgh house."

An enterprising incendiary couldn't have found a lovelier spot in which to turn himself loose, if he looked the whole county over. Tree-topped hills hid it from the rest of the world, on three sides; while away from the fourth, an uninhabited plain rolled down to the river. The county road that passed the front gate was shunned by automobiles, so McClump said, in favor of the State Highway to the north.

Where the house had been was now a mound of blackened ruins. We poked around in the ashes for a few minutes — not that we expected to find anything, but because it's the nature of man to poke around in ruins.

A garage in the rear, whose interior gave no evidence of recent occupation, had a badly scorched roof and front, but was otherwise undamaged. A shed behind it, sheltering an ax, a shovel, and various odds and ends of gardening tools, had escaped the fire altogether. The lawn in front of the house, and the garden behind the shed — about an acre in all — had been pretty thoroughly cut and trampled by wagon wheels, and the feet of the firemen and the spectators.

Having ruined our shoe-shines, McClump and I got back in our car and swung off in a circle around the place, calling at all the houses within a mile radius, and getting little besides jolts for our trouble.

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The nearest house was that of Pringle, the man who had turned in the alarm; but he not only knew nothing about the dead man, he said he had never even seen him. In fact, only one of the neighbors had ever seen him: a Mrs. Jabine, who lived about a mile to the south.

She had taken care of the key to the house while it was vacant; and a day or two before he bought it, Thornburgh had come to her house, inquiring about the vacant one. She had gone over there with him and showed him through it, and he had told her that he intended buying it, if the price, of which neither of them knew anything, wasn't too high.

He had been alone, except for the chauffeur of the hired car in which he had come from Sacramento, and, save that he had no family, he had told her nothing about himself.

Hearing that he had moved in, she went over to call on him several days later — "just a neighborly visit" — but had been told by Mrs. Coons that he was not at home. Most of the neighbors had talked to the Coonses, and had got the impression that Thornburgh did not care for visitors, so they had let him alone. The Coonses were described as "pleasant enough to talk to when you meet them," but reflecting their employer's desire not to make friends.

McClump summarized what the afternoon had taught us as we pointed our car toward Tavender: "Any of these folks could have touched off the place, but we got nothing to show that any of 'em even knew Thornburgh, let alone had a bone to pick with him."

Tavender turned out to be a crossroads settlement of a general store and post office, a garage, a church, and six dwellings, about two miles from Thornburgh's place. McClump knew the storekeeper and postmaster, a scrawny little man named Philo, who stuttered moistly.

"I n-n-never s-saw Th-thornburgh," he said, "and I n-n-never had any m-mail for him. C-coons" — it sounded like one of these things butterflies come out of — "used to c-come in once a week t-to order groceries — they d-didn't have a phone. He used to walk in, and I'd s-send the stuff over in my c-c-car. Th-then I'd s-see him once in a while, waiting f-for the stage to S-s-sacramento."

"Who drove the stuff out to Thornburgh's?"

"M-m-my b-boy. Want to t-talk to him?"

The boy was a juvenile edition of the old man, but without the stutter. He had never seen Thornburgh on any of his visits, but his business had taken him only as far as the kitchen. He hadn't noticed anything peculiar about the place.

"Who's the night man at the garage?" I asked him.

"Billy Luce. I think you can catch him there now. I saw him go in a few minutes ago."

We crossed the road and found Luce.

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"Night before last — the night of the fire down the road — was there a man here talking to you when you first saw it?"

He turned his eyes upward in that vacant state which people use to aid their memory.

"Yes, I remember now! He was going to town, and I told him that if he took the county road instead of the State Road he'd see the fire on his way in."

"What kind of looking man was he?"

"Middle-aged — a big man, but sort of slouchy. I think he had on a brown suit, baggy and wrinkled."

"Medium complexion?"

"Yes."

"Smile when he talked?"

"Yes, a pleasant sort of fellow."

"Brown hair?"

"Yeah, but have a heart!" Luce laughed. "I didn't put him under a magnifying glass."

From Tavender we drove over to Wayton. Luce's description had fit Henderson all right, but while we were at it, we thought we might as well check up to make sure that he had been coming from Wayton.

We spent exactly twenty-five minutes in Wayton; ten of them finding Hammersmith, the grocer with whom Henderson had said he dined and played pool; five minutes finding the proprietor of the pool room; and ten verifying Henderson's story. . . .

"What do you think of it now, Mac?" I asked, as we rolled back toward Sacramento.

Mac's too lazy to express an opinion, or even form one, unless he's driven to it; but that doesn't mean they aren't worth listening to.

"There ain't a hell of a lot to think," he said cheerfully. "Henderson is out of it, if he ever was in it. There's nothing to show that anybody but the Coonses and Thornburgh were there when the fire started — but there may have been a regiment there. Them Coonses ain't too honest-looking, maybe, but they ain't killers, or I miss my guess. But the fact remains that they're the only bet we got so far. Maybe we ought to try to get a line on them."

"All right," I agreed. "Soon as we get back to town, I'll get a wire off to our Seattle office asking them to interview Mrs. Comerford, and see what she can tell about them. Then I'm going to catch a train for San Francisco and see Thornburgh's niece in the morning."

Next morning, at the address McClump had given me — a rather elaborate apartment building on California Street — I had to wait three-quarters of an hour for Mrs. Evelyn Trowbridge to dress. If I had been younger, or a social caller, I suppose I'd have felt amply rewarded when she finally came in — a tall, slender woman of less than thirty; in some sort of clinging black affair; with a lot of black hair over a very white face, strikingly set off by a small red mouth and big hazel eyes that looked black until you got close to them.

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But I was a busy, middle-aged detective, who was fuming over having his time wasted; and I was a lot more interested in finding the bird who struck the match than I was in feminine beauty. However, I smothered my grouch, apologized for disturbing her at such an early hour, and got down to business.

"I want you to tell me all you know about your uncle — his family, friends, enemies, business connections — everything."

I had scribbled on the back of the card I had sent in to her what my business was.

"He hadn't any family," she said; "unless I might be it. He was my mother's brother, and I am the only one of that family now living."

"Where was he born?"

"Here in San Francisco. I don't know the date, but he was about fifty years old, I think — three years older than my mother."

"What was his business?"

"He went to sea when he was a boy, and, so far as I know, always followed it until a few months ago."

"Captain?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I wouldn't see or hear from him for several years, and he never talked about what he was doing; though he would mention some of the places he had visited — Rio de Janeiro, Madagascar, Tobago, Christiania. Then, about three months ago — some time in May — he came here and told me that he was through with wandering; that he was going to take a house in some quiet place where he could work undisturbed on an invention in which he was interested.

"He lived at the Francisco Hotel while he was in San Francisco. After a couple of weeks he suddenly disappeared. And then, about a month ago, I received a telegram from him, asking me to come to see him at his house near Sacramento. I went up the very next day, and I thought that he was acting queerly — he seemed very excited over something. He gave me a will that he had just drawn up and some life insurance policies in which I was beneficiary.

"Immediately after that he insisted that I return home, and hinted rather plainly that he did not wish me to either visit him again or write until I heard from him. I thought all that rather peculiar, as he had always seemed fond of me. I never saw him again."

"What was this invention he was working on?"

"I really don't know. I asked him once, but he became so excited — even suspicious — that I changed the subject, and never mentioned it again."

"Are you sure that he really did follow the sea all those years?"

"No, I am not. I just took it for granted; but he may have been doing something altogether different."

"Was he ever married?"

"Not that I know of."

"Know any of his friends or enemies?"

"No, none."

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"Remember anybody's name that he ever mentioned?"

"No."

"I don't want you to think this next question insulting, though I admit it is. But it has to be asked. Where were you the night of the fire?"

"At home; I had some friends here to dinner, and they stayed until about midnight. Mr. and Mrs. Walker Kellogg, Mrs. John Dupree, and a Mr. Killmer, who is a lawyer. I can give you their addresses, or you can get them from the phone book, if you want to question them."

From Mrs. Trowbridge's apartment I went to the Francisco Hotel. Thornburgh had been registered there from May tenth to June thirteenth, and hadn't attracted much attention. He had been a tall, broad-shouldered, erect man of about fifty, with rather long brown hair brushed straight back; a short, pointed, brown beard, and healthy, ruddy complexion — grave, quiet, punctilious in dress and manner; his hours had been regular and he had had no visitors that any of the hotel employees remembered.

At the Seamen's Bank — upon which Thornburgh's check, in payment of the house, had been drawn — I was told that he had opened an account there on May fifteenth, having been introduced by W. W. Jeffers & Sons, local stock brokers. A balance of a little more than four hundred dollars remained to his credit. The cancelled checks on hand were all to the order of various life insurance companies; and for amounts that, if they represented premiums, testified to rather large policies. I jotted down the names of the life insurance companies, and then went to the offices of W. W. Jeffers & Sons.

Thornburgh had come in, I was told, on the tenth of May with $15,000 worth of bonds that he wanted sold. During one of his conversations with Jeffers he had asked the broker to recommend a bank, and Jeffers had given him a letter to the Seamen's Bank.

That was all Jeffers knew about him. He gave me the numbers of the bonds, but tracing bonds isn't always the easiest thing in the world.

The reply to my Seattle telegram was waiting for me at the Continental Detective Agency when I arrived.

MRS. EDWARD COMERFORD RENTED APARTMENT AT ADDRESS YOU GIVE ON MAY TWENTY-FIVE. GAVE IT UP JUNE SIX. TRUNKS TO SAN FRANCISCO SAME DAY. CHECK NUMBERS GN FOUR FIVE TWO FIVE EIGHT SEVEN AND EIGHT AND NINE

Tracing baggage is no trick at all, if you have the dates and check numbers to start with — as many a bird who is wearing somewhat similar numbers on his chest and back, because he overlooked that detail when making his getaway, can tell you — and twenty-five minutes in a baggage-room at the Ferry and half an hour in the office of a transfer company gave me my answer.

The trunks had been delivered to Mrs. Evelyn Trowbridge's apartment!

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I got Jim Tarr on the phone.

"Good shooting!" he said, forgetting for once to indulge his wit. "We'll grab the Coonses here and Mrs. Trowbridge there, and that's the end of another mystery."

"Wait a minute!" I cautioned him. "It's not all straightened out yet — there's still a few kinks in the plot."

"It's straight enough for me. I'm satisfied."

"You're the boss, but I think you're being a little hasty. I'm going up and talk with the niece again. Give me a little time before you phone the police here to make the pinch. I'll hold her until they get there."

Evelyn Trowbridge let me in this time, instead of the maid who had opened the door for me in the morning, and she led me to the same room in which we had had our first talk, I let her pick out a seat, and then I selected one that was closer to either door than hers was.

On the way up I had planned a lot of innocent-sounding questions that would get her all snarled up; but after taking a good look at this woman sitting in front of me, leaning comfortably back in her chair, coolly waiting for me to speak my piece, I discarded the trick stuff and came out cold-turkey.

"Ever use the name Mrs. Edward Comerford?"

"Oh, yes." As casual as a nod on the street.

"When?"

"Often. You see, I happen to have been married not so long ago to Mr. Edward Comerford. So it's not really strange that I should have used the name."

"Use it in Seattle recently?"

"I would suggest," she said sweetly, "that if you are leading up to the references I gave Coons and his wife, you might save time by coming right to it?"

"That's fair enough," I said. "Let's do that."

There wasn't a tone or shading, in voice, manner, or expression, to indicate that she was talking about anything half so serious or important to her as a possibility of being charged with murder. She might have been talking about the weather, or a book that hadn't interested her particularly.

"During the time that Mr. Comerford and I were married, we lived in Seattle, where he still lives. After the divorce, I left Seattle and resumed my maiden name. And the Coonses *were* in our employ, as you might learn if you care to look it up. You'll find my husband — or former husband — at the Chelsea apartments.

"Last summer, or late spring, I decided to return to Seattle. The truth of it is — I suppose all my personal affairs will be aired anyhow — that I thought perhaps Edward and I might patch up our differences; so I went back and took an apartment on Woodmansee Terrace. As I was known in Seattle as Mrs. Edward Comerford, and as I thought my using his name might influence him a little, I used it while I was there.

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"Also I telephoned the Coonses to make tentative arrangements in case Edward and I should open our house again; but Coons told me that they were going to California, and so I gladly gave them an excellent recommendation when, some days later, I received a letter of inquiry from an employment bureau in Sacramento. After I had been in Seattle for about two weeks, I changed my mind about the reconciliation — Edward's interest, I learned, was all centered elsewhere; so I returned to San Francisco —"

"Very nice! But —"

"If you will permit me to finish," she interrupted. "When I went to see my uncle in response to his telegram, I was surprised to find the Coonses in his house. Knowing my uncle's peculiarities, and finding them now increased, and remembering his extreme secretiveness about his mysterious invention, I cautioned the Coonses not to tell him that they had been in my employ.

"He certainly would have discharged them, and just as certainly would have quarreled with me — he would have thought that I was having him spied on. Then, when Coons telephoned me after the fire, I knew that to admit that the Coonses had been formerly in my employ, would, in view of the fact that I was my uncle's only heir, cast suspicion on all three of us. So we foolishly agreed to say nothing about it and carry on the deception."

That didn't sound all wrong — but it didn't sound all right. I wished Tarr had taken it easier and let us get a better line on these people, before having them thrown in the coop.

"The coincidence of the Coonses stumbling into my uncle's house is, I fancy, too much for your detecting instincts," she went on, as I didn't say anything. "Am I to consider myself under arrest?"

I'm beginning to like this girl; she's a nice, cool piece of work.

"Not yet," I told her. "But I'm afraid it's going to happen pretty soon."

She smiled a little mocking smile at that, and another when the doorbell rang.

It was O'Hara from police headquarters. We turned the apartment upside down and inside out, but didn't find anything of importance except the will she had told me about, dated July eighth, and her uncle's life insurance policies. They were all dated between May fifteenth and June tenth, and added up to a little more than $200,000.

I spent an hour grilling the maid after O'Hara had taken Evelyn Trowbridge away, but she didn't know any more than I did. However, between her, the janitor, the manager of the apartments, and the names Mrs. Trowbridge had given me, I learned that she had really been entertaining friends on the night of the fire — until after eleven o'clock, anyway — and that was late enough.

Half an hour later I was riding the Short Line back to Sacramento. I

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was getting to be one of the line's best customers, and my anatomy was on bouncing terms with every bump in the road!

Between bumps I tried to fit the pieces of this Thornburgh puzzle together. The niece and the Coonses fitted in somewhere, but not just where we had them. We had been working on the job sort of lopsided, but it was the best we could do with it. In the beginning we had turned to the Coonses and Evelyn Trowbridge because there was no other direction to go; and now we had something on them — but a good lawyer could make hash out of it.

The Coonses were in the county jail when I got to Sacramento. After some questioning they had admitted their connection with the niece, and had come through with stories that matched hers in every detail.

Tarr, McClump and I sat around the sheriff's desk and argued.

"Those yarns are pipe dreams," the sheriff said. "We got all three of 'em cold, and there's nothing else to it. They're as good as convicted."

McClump grinned derisively at his superior, and then turned to me.

"Go on, you tell him about the holes in his little case. He ain't your boss, and can't take it out on you later for being smarter than he is!"

Tarr glared from one of us to the other.

"Spill it, you wise guys!" he ordered.

"Our dope is," I told him, figuring that McClump's view of it was the same as mine, "that there's nothing to show that even Thornburgh knew he was going to buy that house before the tenth of June, and that the Coonses were in town looking for work on the second. And besides, it was only by luck that they got the jobs. The employment office sent two couples out there ahead of them."

"We'll take a chance on letting the jury figure that out."

"Yes? You'll also take a chance on them figuring out that Thornburgh, who seems to have been a nut, might have touched off the place himself! We've got something on these people, Jim, but not enough to go into court with them. How are you going to prove that when the Coonses were planted in Thornburgh's house — if you can even prove that they and the Trowbridge woman knew he was going to load up with insurance policies?"

The sheriff spat disgustedly.

"You guys are the limit! You run around in circles, digging up the dope on these people until you get enough to hang 'em, and then you run around hunting for outs! What's the matter with you now?"

I answered him from halfway to the door — the pieces were beginning to fit together under my skull.

"Going to run some more circles — come on, Mac!"

McClump and I held a conference on the fly, and then I got a car from the nearest garage and headed for Tavender. We made time going out, and got there before the general store

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had closed for the night. The stuttering Philo separated himself from the two men with whom he had been talking, and followed me to the rear of the store.

"Do you keep an itemized list of the laundry you handle?"

"N-n-no; just the amounts."

"Let's look at Thornburgh's."

He produced a begrimed and rumpled account book, and we picked out the weekly items I wanted: $2.60, $3.10, $2.25, and so on.

"Got the last batch of laundry here?"

"Y-yes," he said. "It j-just c-c-came out from the city t-today."

I tore open the bundle — some sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, towels, napkins; some feminine clothing; some shirts, collars, underwear, and socks that were unmistakably Coons's. I thanked Philo while running back to the car.

Back in Sacramento again, McClump was waiting for me at the garage where I had hired the car.

"Registered at the hotel on June fifteenth, rented the office on the sixteenth. I think he's in the hotel now," he greeted me.

We hurried around the block to the Garden Hotel.

"Mr. Henderson went out a minute or two ago," the night clerk told us. "He seemed to be in a hurry."

"Know where he keeps his car?"

"In the hotel garage around the corner."

We were within ten feet of the garage, when Henderson's automobile shot out and turned up the street.

"Oh, Mr. Henderson!" I cried, trying to keep my voice level.

He stepped on the gas and streaked away from us.

"Want him?" McClump asked; and at my nod he stopped a passing roadster by the simple expedient of stepping in front of it.

We climbed in, McClump flashed his star at the bewildered driver, and pointed out Henderson's dwindling taillight. After he had persuaded himself that he wasn't being boarded by a couple of bandits, the commandeered driver did his best, and we picked up Henderson's taillight after two or three turnings, and closed in on him — though his car was going at a good clip.

By the time we reached the outskirts of the city, we had crawled up to within safe shooting distance, and I sent a bullet over the fleeing man's head. Thus encouraged, he managed to get a little more speed out of his car; but we were definitely overhauling him now.

Just at the wrong minute Henderson decided to look over his shoulder at us — an unevenness in the road twisted his wheels — his machine swayed — skidded — went over on its side. Almost immediately, from the heart of the tangle, came a flash and a bullet moaned past my ear. Another. And then, while I was still hunting for something to shoot at in the pile of junk we were drawing down upon, McClump's ancient and battered revolver roared in my other ear.

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Henderson was dead when we got to him — McClump's bullet had taken him over one eye.

McClump said over the body:

"I ain't an inquisitive sort of fellow, but I hope you don't mind telling me why I shot this lad."

"Because he was — *Thornburgh.*"

He didn't say anything for about five minutes. Then: "I reckon that's right. How'd you know it?"

We were sitting beside the wreckage now, waiting for the police that we had sent our commandeered chauffeur to phone for.

"He had to be," I said, "when you think it all over. Funny we didn't hit on it before! All that stuff we were told about Thornburgh had a fishy sound. Whiskers and an unknown profession, immaculate and working on a mysterious invention, very secretive and born in San Francisco — where the fire wiped out all the old records — just the sort of fake that could be cooked up easily.

"Now, consider Henderson. You had told me he came to Sacramento sometime early this summer — and the dates you got tonight show that he didn't come until *after* Thornburgh had bought his house. All right! Now compare Henderson with the descriptions we got of Thornburgh.

"Both are about the same size and age, and with the same color hair. The differences are all things that can be manufactured — clothes, a little sunburn, and a month's growth of beard, along with a little acting, would do the trick. Tonight I went out to Tavender and took a look at the last batch of laundry — *and there wasn't any that didn't fit the Coonses!* And none of the bills all the way back were large enough for Thornburgh to have been as careful about his clothes as we were told he was."

"It must be great to be a detective!" McClump grinned as the police ambulance came up and began disgorging policemen. "I reckon somebody must have tipped Henderson off that I was asking about him this evening." And then, regretfully: "So we ain't going to hang them folks for murder after all."

"No, but we oughtn't have any trouble convicting them of arson plus conspiracy to defraud, and anything else that the Prosecuting Attorney can think up."

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: HUGH PENTECOST

Hugh Pentecost used to frequent a gymnasium — it was called an "exercise club" by the management, which gives you some idea of the gold-plated dumbbells and the leopard-skin wrestling mats — and one of the regulars, who was also having trouble with his avoirdupois, was a successful bookie. One day they were lying side by side under a pair of sun lamps (solid silver and chrome), and the bookie was reminiscing — an inveterate habit with bookmakers, as no less an authority than Damon Runyon proved to an eternally grateful world. The bookie was saying, in his own peculiarly philosophical way, that the only difference between him now — a respectable businessman with a wife, two kids, and a Park Avenue duplex apartment (and a couple of Cézannes over the fireplace) — the only difference between him and a hobo was one horse on which the bookmaker did not *have a bet.*

Well, no man — bookmaker or banker; butcher, baker, or bacteriologist — can make that sort of statement to a professional detective-story writer without the writer, mouth open and 'tec tongue hanging out, rising to the bait. Mr. Pentecost bit. He swallowed hook, line, and sinker — joyfully.

And out of the paradox of that anecdote — the bet that wasn't a bet — came the central situation, the springboard, for "The Contradictory Case." Except that, craftsman that he is, Mr. Pentecost added other paradoxes and other contradictions — which is not surprising, since the very essence of a detective story is paradox and contradiction. Didn't that prescient (and omniscient) analyzer of 'tec technique, Robert Louis Stevenson, once describe the mystery story as beginning anywhere but at the beginning, and finishing anywhere but at the end?

THE CONTRADICTORY CASE

by HUGH PENTECOST

LIEUTENANT PASCAL of the Homicide Squad threw his cigarette out the window of the hotel room and into the alley below — a violation of a city ordinance. Then he turned.

"All right, sonny," he said, gently. "Let's have it."

"Don't call me sonny!"

Pascal regarded the witness, crouched in the worn, upholstered armchair op-

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posite him, with a speculative eye. He was about five feet tall with reddish-blond hair and a turned-up nose. The bellboy's uniform made him look like a fifteen-year-old kid out of military school.

Actually, from preliminary questioning, Pascal knew that Eddie Connors was twenty-eight.

"Sorry, Eddie," Pascal said. "That was just my clumsy way of trying to sound friendly."

"Cops aren't anybody's friends," Eddie said. His eyes were red-rimmed and hunted-looking.

Pascal was a square, swarthy man with thick, curly, black hair and a prematurely lined face — lines that came from good humor. He was puzzled by Eddie Connors. You don't ordinarily find someone admitting to a particularly brutal murder so readily.

"Let's go back to the beginning," Pascal said. "When did Mr. Sam Lorrimer check into the hotel?"

"Two weeks ago," Eddie said. "Two weeks ago yesterday."

"How do you happen to remember so well, Eddie?"

"You couldn't forget him once you saw him," Eddie said. "Six feet five, cowboy boots, big Stetson hat. You might not remember some people, but you'd remember him. I carried his bags up here for him."

"To this room?"

"Yes," Eddie said. He kept staring down at the threadbare carpet as if he could still see the big body lying there.

"And you saw more of him after that?"

"Yes."

"But you'd never seen him before that?"

"No."

Pascal lit a fresh cigarette. He looked idly around, at the Gideon Bible on the bedside table, at the top of the dresser, at the shabby mahogany writing desk in the corner. No ashtray.

He dropped the match on the carpet and then put his foot on it.

"Eddie, isn't it true you took bets here at the hotel for a Times Square bookmaker?"

"Yes."

"His name is Mike Braxton?" Pascal asked.

"So you found out," Eddie said.

"Sure I found out, Eddie. That's my job — finding out. There was a betting slip in Lorrimer's hand, clenched tight in it, when he was found. You gave him that slip, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"He had bet a thousand dollars on a horse called Samovar."

"That's right."

"Samovar came in at twenty-to-one."

Eddie Connors moistened his lips. "That's why I killed him."

"*Non sequitur*," Pascal said.

"What?"

"It doesn't follow, Eddie. The horse won, but it was no skin off your back. Mike Braxton was the one who had to worry. He had to pay off."

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"No," Eddie said.

"Explain, please," Pascal said.

"I didn't place the bet." Eddie still stared at the rug. "I figured a twenty-to-one shot wouldn't come in. I just hung onto the thousand bucks. I figured the horse would lose and I'd have the money and no one would be the wiser. But when the horse won —"

"You killed Lorrimer?"

Eddie nodded.

"Why?"

"Because when he asked Braxton for his money he wouldn't get it. Then I'd be in a jam."

"What could he do to you? He couldn't have you arrested. It isn't legal to place bets. All you had to do was give him back his thousand dollars and say you couldn't get the bet down."

"He would have been sore."

"So you killed him so he wouldn't get sore at you?"

Eddie squirmed around in his chair. "I didn't figure all the angles, I guess. I just did the first thing that came into my head."

"So tell me what came into your head, Eddie — in sequence."

"I took the money and gave him the receipt slip. Then I went out and I got thinking how this was an easy thousand bucks for me. So I didn't take it to Braxton. I went down in the basement — to a room I've got there. I listened to the race on the radio. When the horse won I knew I was in a hell of a hole."

"So you came up here and killed him?"

"Yes."

"You looped that gold chain around his neck and choked him until he was dead?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get the chain? It's gold."

"I had it."

"Where did you get it, Eddie?"

"It — it was a gift. A fellow who stayed here once. I — I did a favor for him. He gave it to me."

"So you took the chain and came up here to Lorrimer's room, put the chain around his neck, and choked him to death."

"Yes." It was a whisper.

The ash dribbled off the end of Pascal's cigarette and down his shirt front. He brushed it away, absently. "I want to get a clear picture of this. Lorrimer was six feet five. He was a cattleman from Texas, all muscle and rawhide, the whole two hundred and ten pounds of him. You're five feet."

"Five feet one and a half."

"Five feet one and a half. You weigh about a hundred and ten pounds, soaking wet. But you overpowered Lorrimer, looped a chain around his neck, and strangled him. Eddie, he could have broken you over his knee like a piece of kindling."

"Maybe I — I took him by surprise," Eddie said.

"Maybe," Pascal said. "After you killed him why didn't you take the betting slip out of his hand? That gave you away."

"I didn't think of it," Eddie said. "I guess I was rattled."

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Pascal sighed. "Medical science isn't always accurate, Eddie. For instance, it's a myth that a doctor can tell just exactly how long a man has been dead. But he can make a rough guess. The medical examiner says Lorrimer had been dead *at least* one hour when he was found. Maybe more — but *at least* one hour."

"So what?" Eddie said, lifting his eyes to Pascal for the first time.

"So Lorrimer was killed *before* Samovar came in at twenty-to-one. You said you killed him because you were in a jam *after* the horse won. I may not be very efficient, Eddie, but whatever I may not do, I always check details like that."

"Oh," Eddie said, in a hollow voice.

"So you had no motive, Eddie, and I just can't swallow the idea of your overpowering Lorrimer. That's out of a comic strip. It's been fun, Eddie. But it won't do. Do you want to think up another one?"

Eddie sat motionless in the chair, chewing on his stubby fingers. Pascal walked over to the window and stood staring down at the street twelve floors below. Finally he dropped his cigarette out the window and watched it float downward. He still found it difficult to forget the picture of the giant Sam Lorrimer, lying on the faded rug, the gold chain eating into the flesh of his neck. The Merrilton Hotel was no kind of a place for Sam Lorrimer to die. Once it may have been a class-A hotel, but down through the years it had degenerated into a cheap theatrical hangout. Lorrimer should have died outdoors, with prairie grass in his face. "Hell, I should be writing soap operas!" Pascal muttered, and turned away from the window.

"Well, Eddie?"

Eddie drew a deep breath. "I didn't kill him," he said.

"Fine," Pascal said, cheerfully. "Let's hear how this version goes."

"Part of what I told you is true," Eddie said. "Every day for two weeks this Lorrimer called me up here and placed a bet on the horses. Not much, you understand. About fifty bucks. Every day he lost. Braxton had taken seven, eight hundred dollars off him. Then today he comes up with a thousand bucks on a twenty-to-one shot. I — I figured, like I told you, it was easy money for me. So I — I didn't pass it on to Braxton and I went down in the basement and listened to the race. When Samovar won I knew I was in a jam."

"Go ahead, Eddie."

"Well — I came upstairs and in the lobby I see a guy I know is a hood for Braxton — a killer, you understand."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No! That is — sure I saw him before, or how would I know he was Braxton's hood?"

"Miracles do happen," Pascal said, dryly. "So you saw this killer."

"I knew right away they'd sent him to get me," Eddie said.

"Why?"

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"Because I didn't place the bet."

"Oh, Eddie!" Pascal sounded tired.

"What's the matter?"

"Braxton should have pinned a medal on you. You saved him twenty thousand bucks by not placing it."

"But I held out on him. I knew he wouldn't stand for that. That's why I told you I killed Lorrimer."

"Brother!" Pascal said.

"I figured I'd better run the risk of getting off with that. I'd be safer in jail with Braxton's killer looking for me."

"We will now have a short interlude of organ music," Pascal said. "Eddie, Eddie! I admit I am no Sherlock Holmes, but give me credit for some brains. I told you I may overlook a lot of things, but I always check."

"What do you mean?" Eddie looked up, deep anxiety in his red eyes.

"Well, there's a girl at the switchboard," Pascal said. "Lorrimer called you to his room at five minutes to one. You went there. About ten minutes later you came downstairs in the elevator. There'd been another call for you from the occupant of Room 1214. This occupant of Room 1214 wanted to see you at once. You went up there, stayed another ten or fifteen minutes. Then you came down, told one of the boys to take over for you because you had to go on an errand to Gorton's Pharmacy a couple of blocks away. You went to Gorton's. There you bought some pancake make-up — telling the clerk you needed it for someone who wanted to cover up a black eye. You were back in the hotel in about fifteen minutes and went upstairs again, presumably to take the package to Room 1214. No one saw you again for about an hour — *after* Lorrimer's body was discovered by the floor maid. Now, Eddie, would you like to fit all those facts into your story of listening to the race in the basement, seeing a killer wandering around the lobby, being afraid Braxton would have you murdered for doing him a big favor?"

"No," Eddie said sharply. "I wouldn't."

"I suppose I can get it out of the girl in Room 1214," Pascal said.

"*No!*" Eddie twisted from side to side in the chair. "Damn you!"

"I know, Eddie. Nobody ever likes us. But would you like to take one more try at this story?"

Eddie sat hunched in the chair, looking shriveled and much older. Pascal lit another cigarette, hesitated, and dropped the match on the top of the bureau.

"You know, Eddie," he said gently, "a cop looks like a blank wall — sort of a one-dimensional character — to most people. He's a blank wall with a gun and a tough approach and a tin badge, and nothing behind him. But that isn't true, Eddie. I'm a man, just like you. I've got a girl I'm crazy about. I eat food, just like you. I feel warm and cold, just like you; I even get scared, just like you. So it might be, if you told me the truth, I'd understand."

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Eddie covered his face with his hands. "I'd rather of died than mix her up in this," he said.

"Who, Eddie?"

"Miss Russell."

"The girl in Room 1214?"

Eddie nodded. "She's the only woman ever treated me like a — like a man."

Pascal's eyes narrowed to keep out the smoke from his cigarette. "Tell me about it, Eddie."

"She checked in two weeks ago."

"Same time as Lorrimer?"

"That was a coincidence," Eddie said, quickly. "They had no connection with each other."

"I see."

"She's beautiful," Eddie said. "Taller than me — but warm, and kind, and beautiful. She's a dancer. Part of a team called Russell and Sebastian. I guess they do hotel work and night clubs. It's — it's just a professional association. This Sebastian is an s.o.b."

"In what way, Eddie?"

"He's tall," Eddie said, "and dark — with sideburns! He's always been nasty to me. And — well, there's more to it."

"Take your time," Pascal said.

"Sebastian doesn't stay here in the hotel," Eddie said. "He'd just come here to call for her when they had a job."

"They didn't work regularly?"

"No. Maybe two-three times a week. I guess they did fill-ins and parties and stuff like that. The first day Linda was here I — "

"Linda?"

"Linda Russell. Her first name is Linda. The first day she was here she sent for a bellhop and I happened to take the call." A slow red color began to creep up into Eddie's cheeks. "Maybe, like you said, Lieutenant, you're human. Maybe you eat and sleep and got a girl and get scared. *But you're not five foot one and a half!*" It was bitterness, dredged up from a deep, dark well. "People don't pat you on the head, and call you 'sonny' and offer you candy instead of tips. People don't try to hold you on their lap and treat you like you were in the sixth grade, when you're a *man*, and you feel like a *man* feels, and you want the things a *man* wants. You want to make love, and you want to be a big shot, and stand on your own feet, and be *respected*. You don't want to be called *cute!*" The breath came out of him in a long sigh. "That's something that isn't behind your blank wall, Lieutenant, something you don't know about."

"No, Eddie," Pascal said, "but I can see it would be rough. Really rough."

"You're telling me! Well, Linda didn't treat me that way. She never made one crack about my being small. She talked to me like I was anyone else. It got so when she wanted something she'd ask for me specially. She had a radio record-player in her room and a collection of good hot records. She'd ask me to sit down and listen, and she'd offer me a cigarette, and sometimes a drink. She talked-

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about herself when she was a kid, and about the dancing racket, and what a mean s.o.b. this Sebastian is — but he's a good dancer and he has the in with the booking agents. Then — twice she let me take her out to dinner when I was off. And she danced with me, and she — she treated me like anyone."

"Go on, Eddie."

"I guess I opened my yap plenty to her, too. I told her how tough it was when I was a kid, being so small — and how I couldn't ever get a decent job for the same reason. Then, the last time we were out, she let me kiss her good night. And it wasn't like she was doing me a favor. It was like she *wanted* to! Blast it, Lieutenant, don't you see I'd rather go to the chair than have you bother her with five minutes of your third degree on my account?"

"It wouldn't be on your account, Eddie. It's on Lorrimer's account."

"But I've accidentally got her into it," Eddie said. "By just being there when — when —"

"When Lorrimer was killed?"

"I don't know when he was killed, but I was with Linda when the commotion started out in the hall — when the maid found him."

Pascal glanced at the window, sighed, dropped his cigarette on the rug and heeled it out. "Who gave her the black eye, Eddie?"

"You've seen her!" Eddie's voice shook.

"No. But she sent you out to buy stuff to cover a black eye, didn't she?"

"Okay," Eddie said. "I'll tell you. Only let her alone, will you, Lieutenant, let her alone!"

"If I can," Pascal said. "I promise you I will, if I can, Eddie."

"You had it fairly straight," Eddie said. "Lorrimer sent for me just before one."

"How are you so sure of the time?"

"Because while I was talking to him the maid from room service knocked on his door and said his lunch was there. He had his lunch served every day at one o'clock. Same thing always — a scotch sour, a turkey sandwich on toast, and iced coffee. The maid always knocks on his door and leaves the wagon with his lunch on it out in the hall. He gets it when he's ready."

"I see."

"He had just got a phone call and he was talking when the maid knocked. He told me to tell the maid to leave it as usual."

"Who was he talking to on the phone?"

"I don't know," Eddie said. "From the way he talked I figured it was a babe. You know — he made his voice sound kind of sweet and laughing."

"Go ahead, Eddie."

"Well, Lorrimer was stretched out on the bed and he'd been figuring something out with a pencil and paper from the racing form. He handed me the thousand dollars — two five-hundred-dollar bills — and told me to get it down on Samovar. I wrote him out a slip and beat it out of there. I figured I'd better get to Braxton quick. There was something fishy about that bet."

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"Fishy?"

"Look, a guy bets fifty bucks every day for a couple of weeks and loses every dime of it. Suddenly he lays a thousand bucks on a rank outsider. *It figures he knows something!* Braxton couldn't refuse the bet on account of he'd taken Lorrimer's money for two weeks and there'd be a stink if he refused. But he'd want to spread as much of that grand around as he could — maybe lay a covering bet on the horse himself. I knew I'd better get to him quick.

"I was on my way when Fay, on the switchboard, told me Linda had called and wanted to see me as quick as I could get there. I figured I had just time to go up and tell her why I didn't have any time at the moment, and then get over to Braxton.

"I went up to her room and knocked. She usually opened the door for me, but this time she called out to me to come in. Her voice sounded kind of muffled, like she was on the far side of the room. She was sitting in a chair with her back to me. The shades were drawn and the room was kind of dark. She had a handkerchief up to her face and she was crying.

" 'Don't come any closer, Eddie,' she said. 'I don't want you to see me!'

" 'What's the matter?' I asked her.

" 'I — I had a little trouble,' she said. 'I've got a — a black eye.'

" 'Did somebody hit you?' I asked her.

"She started to cry. Lieutenant, it was like red clouds rolling up in front of me. I was shaking all over.

" 'Who was it?' I asked her.

"She just shook her head back and forth. Then she started laughing and crying at the same time. 'It's so embarrassing,' she said.

" 'You got to tell me who it was!' I said. I told myself whoever it was I'd kill him for this. I had a pretty good idea, too. Sebastian, her dancing partner. As far as I knew she didn't see any other guys in the hotel. I swore I'd get him if it was the last thing I ever did. But she tried to calm me down. She said all she wanted was some special kind of make-up they have in some drug stores that you can cover up a black eye with. She said Gorton's, down a couple of blocks from here, had it and would I go get some. She had written down on a piece of paper what she wanted."

"Did she admit it was Sebastian who'd given her the black eye?" Pascal asked.

"No. She saw how churned up I was and she just kept trying to calm me down. But it had to be him."

"Okay, Eddie. Go ahead."

"She was lying down with a wet cloth over her eye when I got back. I put the package on the bureau and she asked me to turn on the radio. There's a small station that does classical music.

" 'Don't go, Eddie,' she said. 'Stay and talk to me.'

"So I sat down beside the bed, still burning up with ideas of what I'd do to Sebastian. Then suddenly the music stopped on the radio and the announcer said they were going to bring

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us the feature race from Belmont. I guess I nearly fainted. In the excitement I'd forgot about Lorrimer's dough in my pocket. I'd forgot everything except helping Linda. I just sat there, frozen, waiting to hear the race. If Samovar won I was in the soup but good." Eddie drew a deep breath. "Samovar won."

"You told Linda about it?" Pascal asked.

"No. It was *my* headache, Lieutenant. I just sat there, trying to think what to do. It seemed like the only thing was to take it over the fence. Then I heard a commotion in the hall. It was the maid. She'd come to get the lunch dishes in Lorrimer's room and she'd found him. I was stuck. I left Linda, but I couldn't leave the hotel. By the time I got downstairs the prowl-car cops had the place sealed up."

"Go on, Eddie."

"That's all," Eddie said. "The first cop to look over the crime sees the slip in Lorrimer's hand. He finds out I'm the guy who takes the bets in the hotel and he holds me. Then — then you came along."

Pascal was silent for a long time. He seemed to be debating something with himself. Finally he walked over toward the door.

"We'd better get you tidied up, Eddie," he said. "The girl gives you an alibi, if your stories check. You're going to need it when the D.A. begins hunting around for a suspect."

"Do you have to drag Linda into it?" Eddie asked.

"'Fraid so," Pascal said. "Come on."

Pascal knocked on the door of Room 1214. There was considerable delay before it was opened by Linda Russell. She wasn't tall, except in relation to Eddie. Pascal understood at once what Eddie had seen in her. She was beautiful, and her voice was soft and husky and a little anxious. Her wide brown eyes moved from Pascal to Eddie.

"Eddie, what's happened?"

Pascal introduced himself. "Eddie needs an alibi, Miss Russell, and from what he's told me you may be able to give it to him."

"I tried to keep you out of it, Linda," Eddie said.

"Yes, he even confessed to the murder to keep you out of it," Pascal said.

"But Eddie! Didn't you know I'd be only too happy to tell the lieutenant you were here?" It was a loving reproach.

"I didn't want you mixed up in it," Eddie said.

"Foolish! Won't you both come in?"

"Thanks, Miss Russell," Pascal said.

The shades in the room were raised now and the late afternoon sun made a bright pattern on the faded beige rug. Pascal moved over and stood by the bureau, glancing down at the odds and ends on its surface — a lipstick, a little box of powder, a hand mirror, nail scissors and an orange wood stick, a small package wrapped in green

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paper, a handbag with the gold initials "L.R." on the clasp.

"Can you tell me just exactly what your connection was with Eddie this afternoon?" Pascal asked.

"Of course," Linda Russell said. "I called downstairs and asked for him about one o'clock. I — I was in trouble."

"The black eye?" Pascal asked.

"Yes. I wanted some special make-up from the drug store. I couldn't get it myself, looking the way I did. You can see what a wonderful job it does." She raised her fingers to her eye.

"You'd never know," Pascal admitted.

"Eddie went and got it and brought it back for me. I was pretty upset. Eddie and I have become good friends and he stayed here talking to me for quite a while."

"How long did he stay, Miss Russell?"

"I should think it must have been an hour," she said.

"Was there any special reason for his leaving when he did?"

"The commotion in the hall," Linda said. "It — the maid had discovered the murder."

Pascal hesitated, rubbing his jaw thoughtfully. "Well, I guess that does it for you, Eddie. We know you did go to the drug store and that you couldn't have run the errand in much less than fifteen minutes. Miss Russell accounts for the rest of your time."

"You were foolish not to come to me right away, Eddie," Linda said.

"Yes, wasn't he," Pascal said. He looked down at the dresser top, his eyes on the green paper package.

"Have you any leads, Lieutenant?" Linda asked. "Any idea who might have killed the man?"

"It's a puzzling case," Pascal said. "It begins with a bet that wasn't a bet. A coincidence that wasn't a coincidence. Then we had a murderer who didn't kill anybody. Then we have an alibi that isn't an alibi. It's very confusing."

Linda frowned slightly. "I don't follow you, Lieutenant. Coincidence?"

"That you, Miss Russell, and Sam Lorrimer registered here at the Merrilton at the same time."

Linda drew in her breath, sharply. "But what has that got to do with —?"

"You didn't know Sam Lorrimer?"

"Of course not. I never even laid eyes on him. I don't know what he looked like even now."

"No, you wouldn't know what he looks like now. The face swollen and black, the tongue protruding, the spine bent backwards in the last terrible effort to draw breath. No, you wouldn't know what he looks like now."

"Lieutenant!" Eddie shouted. "Cut that out! What the hell kind of a way is that to talk in front of a —"

"— a lady, Eddie? I'm sorry, but as I told you, I may be less than brilliant, but I always check. I talked to the chief of police in Lorrimer's home town in Texas. Lorrimer once owned a ranch there, but he lost the whole thing, kit and caboodle, in a card game with some sharper. And Lorri-

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mer's wife ran off with the sharper. Lorrimer, the chief said, always swore he'd get revenge. He worked and made some money and about three weeks ago he headed north to find the sharper and his wife."

Linda stood very still, her hands at her side. "Why are you telling us this, Lieutenant?"

"Lorrimer's wife's name was Linda," Pascal said.

"So there are a million girls named Linda!" Eddie cried. "What are you trying to do?"

"Look here, Lieutenant," Linda said. "The fact that my name is Linda may be a coincidence, but I'm not the Linda you're looking for. If I were, it must be clear to you that I didn't kill this man. I provided Eddie with an alibi, but it so happens the same set of facts alibis me."

"No," Pascal said, in a flat voice.

"But of course they do," Eddie said. "She was here. She couldn't leave the room on account of her eye. I stayed with her for an hour or more — just the time when Lorrimer got knocked off."

"No," Pascal said. He sighed. "I spoke of an alibi that isn't an alibi, Eddie. It could work for you. The fifteen minutes in which you and Linda *weren't* together could be accounted for in your case by your trip to the drug store. But where was Linda during those fifteen minutes?"

"Right here in my room!" Linda said. "Putting cold compresses on my eye."

"The black eye that isn't a black eye," Pascal said. He reached out, suddenly, picked up the package on the bureau, and ripped off the green-paper wrapping. "Isn't this the stuff you bought at the drugstore, Eddie?"

Eddie stared at it, his eyes slowly widening.

"A black eye," Pascal said, in the voice of a platform lecturer, "is caused by a hemorrhaging under the skin as a result of a blow. The hemorrhage extends to the eyeball, making it blurred and bloodshot. Your eyes, both of them, are clear as a winter day, Miss Russell. No black eye — not recently."

Linda said nothing. She stood there, her face draining of color, her teeth clamped down over her lower lip.

"Eddie, while you were getting the make-up for the black eye that isn't a black eye, Miss Russell — or Mrs. Lorrimer — was visiting her husband down the hall."

"Prove it!" Linda said. She didn't sound husky and sympathetic any longer.

"She *couldn't* have killed him!" Eddie cried out in a kind of despair. "You said so yourself, Pascal. You said *I* couldn't, because I was too small, because I wasn't strong enough to overpower Lorrimer. Well, *she isn't strong enough either!*"

Pascal nodded. "Nice point, Eddie. She didn't kill him. She only helped."

"Are you crazy, Lieutenant?" Linda said.

"It has been suggested before," Pascal said. His hand moved quickly again and he picked up Linda's hand

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bag. "This is an odd type bag, Miss Russell. Nothing to carry it by. No handle. No strap. But there are some gold loops here to which something was fastened. A gold chain, perhaps?"

"Yes," she said, readily. "It broke. I'm having it fixed. But what has that to do with —"

"Lorrimer was strangled to death with that gold chain, Miss Russell."

"*Strangled!*" There was a look of total disbelief in her eyes.

"Does that surprise you?" Pascal asked, softly. "Didn't anyone tell you he'd been strangled with a gold chain, Miss Russell?"

"No!" Her eyes were suddenly very bright. "I assumed —"

"You assumed what?"

"Nothing," she said, quickly. "I just thought that —"

"— that he'd been poisoned?" Pascal's voice was deadly quiet. Suddenly he overturned the handbag and dumped its contents on the bureau top. Linda took a quick step toward him and then stopped. The contents of the bag spilled out — lipstick, compact, money, pencil, lists, keys, and a small medicine bottle. Pascal picked up the bottle. He unscrewed the top and held the bottle to his nose.

"Listen to me, Lieutenant," Linda said. "I wanted to protect Eddie as best I could. He's a nice kid. But I'm not going to the chair on his account."

"No," Pascal said, thoughtfully, "you're not."

"You're right about Sam Lorrimer. He was my husband. It wasn't a coincidence my coming here to the Merrilton the same time he did. I was warned by a friend back in Texas that he was on his way north to find me and Mike."

"Mike Braxton was the sharper who cleaned your husband, wasn't he, Linda?" Pascal said. "Don't tell me — I checked. Mike Braxton is the man you ran away with and with whom you've been living. There is no dance team of Russell and Sebastian. No booking agent in town ever heard of them. Sebastian is a strong-arm boy for Braxton. I —"

"You checked," Linda said bitterly. "I came here to try to talk Sam out of his idea for revenge. Naturally I tried to keep my relationship to him hidden from everybody else in the hotel, because if I wasn't successful, then Mike and I were going to have to get rid of him. In self-defense, you understand!"

"Sure," Pascal said. "In self-defense."

"This crazy Eddie fell for me," Linda said. She ignored the groan that came from Eddie. "He saw me talking to Sam out here in the hall once. Sam was acting fresh. Today, when I told Eddie I had a black eye, he thought it was Sam. *I told him it was Sam!*"

"No!" Eddie cried out. "You didn't. You never said who it was. You —"

"She just let you *think* it," Pascal said.

"Eddie had that gold chain," Linda said. "I gave it to him yesterday to have it fixed for me. How could I guess he would use it to kill a man?"

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"He couldn't have — without your help," Pascal said. "He couldn't have handled Lorrimer, even if he took him by surprise. He isn't big enough."

"Then you mean Eddie didn't kill him?"

"Oh, he killed him," Pascal said. He looked down at the boy hunched in the chair. "I'm sorry, Eddie. I'm sorry as hell. But you did kill him. But you couldn't have done it without Linda's help. Will you tell me about it, Eddie, or shall I tell you?"

Eddie didn't speak. He sat in the chair, his face covered by his trembling hands.

"I had nothing to do with it!" Linda cried. "I never left this room. I —"

"Please," Pascal said, wearily. "Let's get it over with. You meant to use Eddie as an alibi. You told him about your black eye — faking it. You sent him out for the make-up. He went, all right, but all the time he thought Lorrimer was responsible. He was burning. When he came back from the drug store he was at the explosion point. Instead of coming straight here he went to Lorrimer's room. I don't think he had a plan. He knocked, and when Lorrimer didn't answer, he went in. Lorrimer was lying on the floor. He was unconscious, but alive. Eddie had that gold chain in his pocket. He hadn't got around to having it repaired. He was crazy with anger, and he looped the chain around Lorrimer's neck and choked him till he was dead. But he couldn't have done it unless Lorrimer had been helpless. The pity of it is, if he'd waited a little longer Lorrimer would have been dead when he found him — dead from the poison you put in his whiskey sour while the tray stood outside his door."

"You haven't a shred of proof —"

"Please," Pascal said. "I checked. I knew the drink had been poisoned. I know now that the poison came from this bottle and a laboratory test will prove it. You were surprised when you heard Lorrimer'd been strangled, Linda. It looked like an out. Well — it isn't. Because Eddie couldn't have managed it without your help — which makes you his accomplice." He shook his head. "A contradictory case," he said. "The bet that wasn't a bet. The coincidence that wasn't a coincidence. The black eye that wasn't a black eye. And a passionate love for a fine girl — who wasn't a fine girl at all. . . . Come on, both of you."

Watch EQ on TV

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Michael Sadleir, the world's outstanding authority on 19th Century fiction, has made the most discerning appraisal to date of Joseph Shearing's work in a certain field. He salutes Joseph Shearing as "an outstanding writer of what — for want of a better term — may be called 'Tales of Terror.'"

What exactly is a true Tale of Terror? Mr. Sadleir is very precise in his definition: it is not, he says, a ghost story, although it may deal in the supernatural; it is not a crime story, although it may pivot on a crime; it is not "Grand Guignol," although he admits that some of Joseph Shearing's stories have all the qualities, including "the final horrific twist which we associate with this peculiarly French interpretation of the harmless sounding 'puppet-show.'"

The true Tale of Terror, in Michael Sadleir's brilliant definition, is "a deliberate massing together of human wickedness and frailty, of forlorn landscape, of sombre furnishings, of desolate weather or of the menace of storm, which devil's brew is then administered to the reader in such a way as to provoke a gasp of fascinated horror, as though for one moment he had peered over the edge of a sudden fissure in his path and looked down into Hell."

May your flesh creep . . .

THE SCOURED SILK

by JOSEPH SHEARING

THIS IS a tale that might be told in many ways and from various points of view; it has to be gathered from here and there — a letter, a report, a diary, a casual reference. In its day the thing was more than a passing wonder, and it left a mark of abiding horror on the neighbourhood.

The house in which Mr. Orford lived has finally been destroyed; the mural tablet in St. Paul's, Covent Garden, may be sought for in vain by the curious; but little remains of the old Piazza where the quiet scholar passed on his daily walks. The very records of what was once so real have become blurred, almost incoherent in their dealings with things forgotten; but this thing happened to real people, in a real London, not so long ago that the last generation had not spoken with those who remembered some of the actors in this terrible drama.

It is round the person of Humphrey Orford that this tale turns, as, at the time, all the mystery and horror centred; yet until his personality was

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brought thus tragically into fame, he had not been an object of interest to many; he had, perhaps, a mild reputation for eccentricity, but this was founded merely on the fact that he refused to partake of the amusements of his neighbours and showed a dislike for much company.

But this was excused on the ground of his scholarly predilections; he was known to be translating, in a leisurely fashion, as became a gentleman, Ariosto's great romance into English couplets, and to be writing essays on recondite subjects connected with grammar and language, which were not the less esteemed because they had never been published.

His most authentic portrait, taken in 1733 and intended for a frontispiece for the Ariosto when this should come to print, shows a slender man with reddish hair, rather severely clubbed, a brown coat, and a muslin cravat; he looks straight out of the picture, and the face is long, finely shaped, and refined, with eyebrows rather heavier than one would expect from such delicacy of feature.

When this picture was painted Mr. Orford was living near Covent Garden, close to the mansion once occupied by the famous Dr. Radcliffe, a straight-fronted house, dark, of obvious gentility, with a little architrave portico over the door and a few steps leading up to it; a house with neat windows and a gloomy air, like every other residence in that street and most other streets of the same status in London.

And if there was nothing remarkable about Mr. Orford's dwelling-place or person, there was nothing, as far as his neighbours knew, remarkable about his history.

He came from a good Suffolk family, in which county he was believed to have considerable estates (though it was a known fact that he never visited them), and he had no relations, being the only child of an only child and his parents dead; his father had purchased this town house in the reign of King William, when the neighbourhood was very fashionable; and up to it he had come twenty years ago — nor had he left it since.

He had brought with him an ailing wife, a housekeeper, and a man-servant, and to the few families of his acquaintance near, who waited on him, he explained that he wished to give young Mrs. Orford, who was of a mopish disposition, the diversions of a few months in town.

But soon there was no longer this motive for remaining in London, for the wife, hardly seen by anyone, fell into a short illness and died — just a few weeks after her husband had brought her up from Suffolk. She was buried very simply in St. Paul's, and the mural tablet, set up with a draped urn in marble, ran thus:

FLORA, WIFE OF
HUMPHREY ORFORD, Esq.
of this Parish
Died November, 1713, aged 27 years.

Mr. Orford made no effort to leave the house; he remained, people

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thought, rather stunned by his loss, kept himself close in the house, and for a considerable time wore deep mourning.

But this was twenty years ago, and all had forgotten the shadowy figure of the young wife, whom so few had seen and whom no one had known anything about or been interested in; and all trace of her seemed to have passed out of the quiet, regular, and easy life of Mr. Orford when an event that gave rise to some gossip caused the one-time existence of Flora Orford to be recalled and discussed among the curious. This event was none other than the sudden betrothal of Mr. Orford and the announcement of his almost immediate marriage.

The bride was one who had been a prattling child when the groom had first come to London; one old lady, who was for ever at her window watching the little humours of the street, recollected and related how she had seen Flora Orford, alighting from the coach that had brought her from the country, turn to this child, who was gazing from the railing of the neighbouring house, and touch her bare curls lovingly and yet with a sad gesture. And that was about the only time anyone ever did see Flora Orford, she so soon became ailing; and the next the inquisitive old lady saw of her was the slender brown coffin being carried through the dusk towards St. Paul's Church.

But that was twenty years ago, and here was the baby grown up into Miss. Elisa Minden, a very personable young woman, soon to be the second Mrs. Humphrey Orford. Of course there was nothing very remarkable about the match; Elisa's father, Dr. Minden, had been Mr. Orford's best friend (as far as he could be said to have a best friend or indeed any friend at all) for many a long year, both belonged to the same quiet set, both knew all about each other. Mr. Orford was not much above forty-five or so, an elegant, well-looking man, wealthy, with no vices and a calm, equable temper; while Miss Elisa, though pretty and well-mannered, had an insufficient dowry, no mother to fend for her, and the younger sisters to share her slender advantages. So what could anyone say save that the good doctor had done very well for his daughter and that Mr. Orford had been fortunate enough to secure such a fresh, capable maiden for his wife. It was said that the scholar intended giving up his bookish ways — that he even spoke of going abroad a while, to Italy, for preference; he was, of course, anxious to see Italy, as all his life had been devoted to preparing the translation of an Italian classic.

The quiet betrothal was nearing its decorous conclusion when one day Mr. Orford took Miss Minden for a walk and brought her home round the piazza of Covent Garden, then took her across the cobbled street, past the stalls banked up with the first spring flowers (it was the end of March), under the portico built by the great Inigo Jones, and so into the church.

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"I want to show you where my wife Flora lies buried," said Mr. Orford.

And that is really the beginning of the story.

Now, Miss Minden had been in this church every Sunday of her life and many weekdays and had been used since a child to see that tablet to Flora Orford; but when she heard these words in the quiet voice of her lover and felt him draw her out of the sunlight into the darkness of the church, she experienced a great distaste that was almost fear. It seemed to her both a curious and a disagreeable thing for him to do, and she slipped her arm out of his as she replied:

"Oh, please let us go home!" she said. "Father will be waiting for us and your good Mrs. Boyd vexed if the tea is overbrewed."

"But first I must show you this," he insisted, and took her arm again and led her down the church, past his seat, until they stood between his pew end and the marble tablet in the wall which was just a hand's space above their heads.

"That is to her memory," said Mr. Orford. "And you see, there is nothing said as to her virtues."

Now, Elisa Minden knew absolutely nothing of her predecessor and could not tell if these words were spoken in reverence or irony, so she said nothing, but looked up rather timidly from under the shade of her Leghorn straw at the tall figure of her lover, who was staring sternly at the square of marble.

"And what have you to say to Flora Orford?" he asked sharply, looking down at her quickly.

"Why, sir, she was a stranger to me," replied Miss Minden.

Mr. Orford pressed her arm. "But to me she was a wife," he said. "She is buried under your feet, quite close to where you are standing. Why, think of that, Lizzie, if she could stand up and put out her hand she could catch hold of your dress — she is as near as that."

The words and his manner of saying them filled Miss Minden with shuddering terror, for she was a sensitive and fanciful girl, and it seemed to her a dreadful thing to be thus standing over the bones of the poor creature who had loved the man who was now to be her own husband, and horrible to think that the handful of decay so near them had once clung to this man and loved him.

"Do not tremble, my dear girl," said Mr. Orford. "She is dead."

Tears were in Elisa Minden's eyes, and she answered coldly: "Sir, how can you speak so?"

"She was a wicked woman," he replied, "a very wicked woman."

The girl could not reply as to that; this sudden disclosing of a painful secret abashed her simple mind.

"Need we talk of this?" she asked; then, under her breath — "Need we be married in this church, sir?"

"Of course," he answered shortly, "everything is arranged. To-morrow week."

Miss Minden did not respond:

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hitherto she had been fond of the church, now it seemed spoiled for her — tarnished by the thought of Flora Orford.

Her companion seemed to divine what reflection lay behind her silence.

"You need not be afraid," he said rather harshly. "She is dead. Dead."

And he reached out the light cane he carried and tapped on the stone above his wife's grave, and slowly smiled as the sound rang hollow in the vaults beneath.

Then he allowed Elisa to draw him away, and they returned to Mr. Orford's comfortable house, where in the upper parlour Dr. Minden was awaiting them together with his sister and her son, a soldier cousin whom the quick perceptions of youthful friends had believed to be devoted to Elisa Minden. They made a pleasant little party, with the red curtains drawn and the fire burning up between the polished andirons, and all the service for tea laid out with scones and Naples cake, and Mrs. Boyd coming to and fro with plates and dishes. And everyone was cheerful and friendly and glad to be indoors together, for it was a bleak afternoon, grey out of doors, with a snowstorm coming up and people hurrying home with heads bent before a cutting wind.

But to Elisa's mind had come an unbidden thought: "I do not like this house — it is where Flora Orford died."

And she wondered in which room and also why this had never occurred to her before, and glanced rather thoughtfully at the fresh young face of the soldier cousin as he stood by the fire in his scarlet and white, with his glance on the flames.

But it was a cheerful party, and Elisa smiled and jested with the rest as she served the dishes at tea.

There is a miniature of her painted about this time, and one may see how she looked, with her bright brown hair and bright brown eyes, rosy complexion, pretty nose and mouth, and her best gown of lavender blue tabinet with a lawn tucker, and a lawn cap fastened under the chin with frilled lappets showing now that the big Leghorn hat with the velvet strings was put aside.

Mr. Orford also looked well tonight; he did not look his full age in the ruddy candle-glow, the grey did not show in his abundant hair nor the lines in his fine face, but the elegance of his figure, the grace of his bearing, the richness of his simple clothes were displayed to full advantage; Captain Hoare looked stiff and almost clumsy by contrast.

But now and then Elisa Minden's eyes would rest rather wistfully on the fresh face of this young man who had no dead wife in his life. And something was roused in her meek youth and passive innocence, and she wondered why she had so quietly accepted her father's arrangement of a marriage with this elderly scholar, and why Philip Hoare had let her do it. Her thoughts were quite vague and amounted to no more than a confused sense that something was wrong, but

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she lost her satisfaction in the tea-drinking and the pleasant company and the warm room with the drawn curtains and the bright fire, and rose up saying they must be returning, as there was a great store of mending she had promised to help her aunt with; but Mrs. Hoare would not help her out, but protested, laughing, that there was time enough for that; and the good doctor, who was in a fine humour and in no mood to go out into the bleak streets even as far as his own door, declared that now was the time they must be shown over the house.

"Do you know, Humphrey," he said, "you have often promised us this, but never done it, and all the years that I have known you, I have never seen but this room and the dining-room below; and as to your own particular cabinet ——"

"Well," said Mr. Orford, interrupting in a leisurely fashion, "no one has been in there save Mrs. Boyd now and then, to announce a visitor."

"Oh, you scholars!" smiled the doctor. "A secretive tribe — and a fortunate one; why, in my poor room I have had to have three girls running to and fro!"

The soldier spoke, not so pleasantly as his uncle.

"What have you so mysterious, sir, in this same cabinet that it must be so jealously guarded?" he asked.

"Why, nothing mysterious," smiled the scholar; "only my books and papers and pictures."

"You will show them to me?" asked Elisa Minden, and her lover gave graceful consent; there was further amiable talk, and then the whole party, guided by Mr. Orford holding a candle, made a tour of the house and looked over the fine rooms.

Mrs. Hoare took occasion to whisper to the bride-to-be that there were many alterations needed before the place was ready for a lady's use and it was time these were put in hand — why, the wedding was less than a fortnight off!

And Elisa Minden, who had not had a mother to advise her in these matters, suddenly felt that the house was dreary and old-fashioned and an impossible place to live in; the very rooms that had so pleased her good father — a set of apartments for a lady — were to her the most hateful in the house, for they, her lover told her, had been furnished and prepared for Flora Orford twenty years ago.

She was telling herself that when she was married she must at once go away and that the house must be altered before she returned to it, when the party came crowding to the threshold of the library, or private cabinet, and Mr. Orford, holding the candle aloft, led them in. Then as this illumination was not sufficient, he went very quickly and lit the two candles on the mantelpiece.

It was a pleasant apartment, lined with books from floor to ceiling, old, valuable, and richly bound books, save only in the space above the chimney-piece, which was occupied by a portrait of a lady, and the panel

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behind the desk — this was situated in a strange position, in the farthest corner of the room fronting the wall, so that anyone seated there would be facing the door with the space of the room between; the desk was quite close to the wall, so that there was only just space for the chair at which the writer would sit, and to accommodate this there were no bookshelves behind it, but a smooth panel of wood on which hung a small picture; this was a rough, dark painting, and represented a man hanging on a gallows on a wild heath; it was a subject out of keeping with the luxurious room, with its air of ease and learning, and while Mr. Orford was showing his first editions, his Elzevirs and Aldines, Elisa Minden was staring at this ugly little picture.

As she looked she was conscious of such a chill of horror and dismay as nearly caused her to shriek aloud. The room seemed to her to be full of an atmosphere of terror and evil beyond expression. Never had such a thing happened to her before; her distaste at her visit to the tomb in the afternoon had been nothing to this. She moved away, barely able to disguise an open panic. As she turned, she half-stumbled against a chair, caught at it, and noticed, hanging over the back, a skirt of peach-coloured silk. Elisa caught at this garment.

"Why, sir," cried she hysterically, "what is this?"

All turned to look at her; her tone, her obvious fright were out of proportion to her discovery.

"Why, child," said Mrs. Hoare, "it is a silk petticoat, as all can see."

"A gift for you, my dear," said the cheerful doctor.

"A gift for me?" cried Elisa. "Why, this has been scoured, and turned, and mended a hundred times!"

And she held up the skirt, which had indeed become like tinder and seemed ready to drop to pieces.

The scholar now spoke. "It belongs to Mrs. Boyd," he said quietly. "I suppose she has been in here to clear up and has left some of her mending."

Now, two things about this speech made a strange impression on everyone: first, it was manifestly impossible that the good housekeeper would ever have owned such a garment as this, that was a lady's dress and such as would be worn for a ball; and, secondly, Mr. Orford had only a short while before declared that Mrs. Boyd only entered his room when he was in it, and then of a necessity and for a few moments. All had the same impression, that this was some garment belonging to his dead wife and as such cherished by him; all, that is, but Elisa, who had heard him call Flora Orford a wicked woman.

She put the silk down quickly (there was a needle sticking into it and a spool of cotton lying on the chair beneath) and looked up at the portrait above the mantelpiece.

"Is that Mrs. Orford?" she asked.

He gave her a queer look.

"Yes," he said.

In a strange silence all glanced up at the picture.

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It showed a young woman in a white gown, holding a crystal heart that hung round her neck; she had dark hair and a pretty face; as Elisa looked at the pointed fingers holding the pretty toy, she thought of the tablet in St. Paul's Church and Mr. Orford's words — "She is so near to you that if she could stretch out her hand she could touch you," and without any remark about the portrait or the sitter, she advised her aunt that it was time to go home. So the four of them left, and Mr. Orford saw them out, standing framed in the warm light of the corridor and watching them disappear into the grey darkness of the street.

It was little more than an hour afterwards when Elisa Minden came creeping down the stairway of her home and accosted her cousin, who was just leaving the house.

"Oh, Philip," said she, clasping her hands, "if your errand be not a very important one, I beg you to give me an hour of your time. I have been watching for you to go out that I might follow and speak to you privately."

The young soldier looked at her keenly as she stood in the light of the hall lamp, and he saw that she was very agitated.

"Of course, Lizzie," he answered kindly, and led her into the little parlour off the hall, where there were neither candles nor fire, but leisure and quiet to talk.

Elisa, being a housekeeper, found a lamp and lit it and apologised for the cold, but she would not return upstairs, she said, for Mrs. Hoare and the two girls and the doctor were all quiet in the great parlour, and she had no mind to disturb them.

"You are in trouble," said Captain Hoare quietly.

"Yes," replied she in a frightened way, "I want you to come with me now to Mr. Orford's house — I want to speak to his housekeeper."

"Why, what is this, Lizzie?"

She had no very good explanation; there was only the visit to the church that afternoon, her impression of horror in the cabinet, the discovery of the scoured silk.

"But I must know something of his first wife, Philip," she concluded. "I could never go on with it if I did not . . . something has happened today — I hate that house, I almost hate . . . *him*."

"Why did you do it, Lizzie?" demanded the young soldier sternly. "This was a nice home-coming for me . . . a man who might be your father, a solitary, one who frightens you."

Miss Minden stared at her cousin; she did not know why she had done it — the whole thing seemed suddenly impossible.

"Please, you must come with me now," she said.

So overwrought was she that he had no heart to refuse her, and they took their warm cloaks from the hall and went out into the dark streets. It was snowing now and the ground slippery underfoot, and Elisa clung to her cousin's arm. She did not want to see

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Mr. Orford or his house ever again, and by the time they reached the doorstep she was in a tremble; but she rang the bell boldly.

It was Mrs. Boyd herself who came to the door; she began explaining that the master was shut up in his cabinet, but the soldier cut her short.

"Miss Minden wishes to see you," he said, "and I will wait in the hall till she is ready."

So Elisa followed the housekeeper down to her basement sitting-room; the man-servant was out and the two maids were quickly dismissed to the kitchen.

Mrs. Boyd, a placid soul, near seventy years, waited for the young lady to explain herself, and Elisa Minden, flushing and paling by turns and feeling foolish and timid, put forth the object of her coming.

She wanted to hear the story of Flora Orford — there was no one else whom she could ask — and she thought that she had a right to know.

"And I suppose you have, my dear," said Mrs. Boyd, gazing into the fire, "though it is not a pretty story for you to hear — and I never thought I should be telling it to Mr. Orford's second wife!"

"Not his wife yet," said Miss Minden.

"There, there, you had better ask the master yourself," replied Mrs. Boyd placidly. "Not but that he would be fierce at your speaking of it, for I do not think a mention of it has passed his lips, and it's twenty years ago and best forgotten, my dear."

"Tell it me and then I will forget," begged Miss Minden.

So then Mrs. Boyd, who was a quiet, harmless soul, with no dislike to telling a tale (though no gossip, as events had proved, she having kept her tongue still on this matter for so long), told her the story of Humphrey Orford's wife.

"She was the daughter of his gamekeeper, my dear, and he married her out of hand, just for her pretty face. But they were not very happy together that I could ever see; she was afraid of him and that made her cringe, and he hated that; and she shamed him with her ignorant ways. And then one day he found her with a lover — saving your presence, mistress — one of her own people, just a common man. And he was just like a creature possessed; he shut up the house and sent away all the servants but me, and brought his lady up to town, to this house here. And what passed between her and him no one will know, but she ever looked like one dying of terror. And then the doctor began to come — Dr. Thursby, it was, that is dead now — and then she died. And no one was able to see her even when she was in her coffin, nor to send a flower. 'Tis likely she died of grief, poor, fond wretch. But, of course, she was a wicked woman and there was nothing to do but pity the master."

And this was the story of Flora Orford.

"And the man?" asked Miss Minden, after a while.

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"The man she loved, my dear? Well, Mr. Orford had him arrested as a thief for breaking into his house — he was wild, that fellow, with not the best of characters. Well, he would not say why he was in the house, and Mr. Orford, being a Justice of the Peace, had some power, so he was just condemned as a common thief. And there are few to this day know the truth of the tale, for he kept his counsel to the last, and no one knew from *him* why he had been found in the squire's house."

"What was his end?" asked Miss Minden in a still voice.

"Well, he was hanged," said Mrs. Boyd. "Being caught red-handed, what could he hope for?"

"Then that is a picture of him in the cabinet!" cried Elisa, shivering for all the great fire; then she added desperately, "Tell me, did Flora Orford die in that cabinet?"

"Oh, no, my dear, but in a great room at the back of the house that has been shut up ever since."

"But the cabinet is horrible," said Elisa; "perhaps it is her portrait and that picture."

"I have hardly been in there," admitted Mrs. Boyd, "but the master lives there — he always has his supper there, and he talks to that portrait, my dear: 'Flora, Flora,' he says, 'how are you to-night?' and then he imitates her voice, answering."

Elisa Minden clapped her hand to her heart. "Do not tell me those things or I shall think that you are hateful too, to have stayed in this dreadful house and endured them!"

Mrs. Boyd was surprised. "Now, my dear, do not be put out," she protested. "They were wicked people, both of them, and got their deserts, and it is an old story best forgotten; and as for the master, he has been just a good creature ever since we have been here, and he will not go talking to any picture when he has a sweet young wife to keep him company."

But Elisa Minden had risen and had her fingers on the handle of the door.

"One thing more," she said breathlessly; "that scoured silk, of a peach colour ——"

"Why, has he got that still? Mrs. Orford wore it the night he found her with her sweetheart. I mind I was with her when she bought it — fine silk at forty shillings the yard. If I were you, my dear, I should burn that when I was mistress here."

But Miss Minden had run upstairs to the cold hall.

Her cousin was not there; she heard angry voices overhead and saw the two maid-servants affrighted on the stairs — a disturbance was unknown in this household.

While Elisa stood bewildered, a door banged and Captain Hoare came down red in the face and fuming; he caught his cousin's arm and hurried her out of the house. In an angry voice he told her of the unwarrantable behaviour of Mr. Orford, who had found him in the hall and called him "intruder" and "spy" without waiting for an explanation; the soldier had

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followed the scholar up to his cabinet and there had been an angry scene about nothing at all, as Captain Hoare said.

"Oh, Philip," broke out poor Elisa as they hastened through the cold darkness, "I can never, never marry him!"

And she told him the story of Flora Orford. The young man pressed her arm through the heavy cloak.

"And how came such a one to entangle thee?" he asked tenderly. "Nay, thou shalt not marry him."

They spoke no more, but Elisa, happy in the protecting and wholesome presence of her kinsman, sobbed with a sense of relief and gratitude. When they reached home they found they had been missed and there had to be explanations; Elisa said there was something that she wished to say to Mrs. Boyd and Philip told of Mr. Orford's rudeness and the quarrel that had followed. The two elder people were disturbed and considered Elisa's behaviour strange, but her manifest agitation caused them to forbear pressing her for an explanation; nor was it any use addressing themselves to Philip, for he went out to his delayed meeting with companions at a coffee-house.

That night Elisa Minden went to bed feeling more emotion than she had ever done in her life; fear and disgust of the man whom hitherto she had placidly regarded as her future husband and a yearning for the kindly presence of her childhood's companion united in the resolute words she whispered into her pillow during that bitter night: "I can never marry him now!"

The next day it snowed heavily, yet a strange elation was in Elisa's heart as she descended to the warm parlour, bright from the fire and light from the glow of the snow without.

She was going to tell her father that she could not carry out her engagement with Mr. Orford and that she did not want ever to go into his house again.

They were all gathered round the breakfast-table when Captain Hoare came in late (he had been out to get a news-letter) and brought the news that was the most unlooked for they could conceive, and that was soon to startle all London.

Mr. Orford had been found murdered in his cabinet.

These tidings, though broken as carefully as possible, threw the little household into the deepest consternation and agitation; there were shrieks and cryings and runnings to and fro. Only Miss Minden, though of a ghastly colour, made no especial display of grief; she was thinking of Flora Orford.

When the doctor could get away from his agitated womenkind, he went with his nephew to the house of Mr. Orford.

The story of the murder was a mystery. The scholar had been found in his chair in front of his desk with one of his own bread-knives sticking through his shoulders; and there was nothing to throw any light as to how

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or through whom he had met his death. The story, sifted from the mazed incoherency of Mrs. Boyd, the hysterics of the maids, the commentaries of the constables, and the chatter of the neighbours, ran thus:

At half-past nine the night before, Mrs. Boyd had sent one of the maids up with the master's supper; it was his whim to have it always thus, served on a tray in the cabinet. There had been wine and meat, bread and cheese, fruit and cakes, the usual plates and silver — among these the knife that had killed Mr. Orford. When the servant left, the scholar had followed her to the door and locked it after her; this was also a common practice of his, a precaution against any possible interruption; for, he said, he did the best part of his work in the evening.

It was found next morning that his bed had not been slept in and that the library door was still locked; as the alarmed Mrs. Boyd could get no answer to her knocks, the manservant was sent for someone to force the lock, and Humphrey Orford had been found in his chair, leaning forward over his papers with the knife thrust up to the hilt between his shoulders. He must have died instantly for there was no sign of any struggle, nor any disarrangement of his person or his papers. The first doctor to see him, a passer-by, attracted by the commotion about the house, said he must have been dead some hours — probably since the night before; the candles had all burnt down to the socket, and there were spillings of grease on the desk; the supper tray stood at the other end of the room, most of the food had been eaten, most of the wine drunk, the articles were all there in order excepting only the knife sticking between Mr. Orford's shoulder blades.

When Captain Hoare had passed the house on his return from buying the news-letter, he had seen the crowd and gone in and been able to say that he had been the last person to see the murdered man alive, as he had had his sharp encounter with Mr. Orford about ten o'clock, and he remembered seeing the supper things in the room. The scholar had heard him below, unlocked the door, and called out such impatient resentment of his presence that Philip had come angrily up the stairs and followed him into the cabinet; a few angry words had passed, when Mr. Orford had practically pushed his visitor out, locking the door in his face and bidding him take Miss Minden home.

This threw no light at all on the murder; it only went to prove that at ten o'clock Mr. Orford had been alive and locked in his cabinet.

Now here was the mystery: in the morning the door was still locked, *on the inside*; the window was, as it had been since early evening, shuttered and fastened across with an iron bar, on the inside, and the room being on an upper floor, access would have been in any case most impossible by the window, which gave on to the smooth brickwork of the front of the house.

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Neither was there any possible place in the room where anyone might have hidden — it was just the square lined with the shallow bookshelves, the two pictures (that sombre little one looking strange now above the bent back of the dead man), the desk, one or two chairs and side-tables; there was not so much as a cupboard or bureau — not a hiding-place for a cat.

How, then, had the murderer entered and left the room?

Suicide, of course, was out of the question owing to the nature of the wound — but murder seemed equally out of the question; Mr. Orford sat so close to the wall that the handle of the knife touched the panel behind him. For anyone to have stood between him and the wall would have been impossible; behind the back of his chair was not space enough to push a walking stick.

How, then, had the blow been delivered with such deadly precision and force? Not by anyone standing in front of Mr. Orford — first because he must have seen him and sprung up; and secondly because, even had he been asleep with his head down, no one, not even a very tall man, could have leant over the top of the desk and driven in the knife, for experiment was made and it was found that no arm could possibly reach such a distance.

The only theory that remained was that Mr. Orford had been murdered in some other part of the room and afterwards dragged to his present position. But this seemed more than unlikely, as it would have meant moving the desk, a heavy piece of furniture that did not look as if it had been touched, and also because there was a paper under the dead man's hand, a pen in his fingers, a splutter of ink where it had fallen, and a sentence unfinished. The thing remained a complete and horrid mystery, one that seized the imagination of men; the thing was the talk of all the coffee-houses and clubs.

The murder seemed absolutely motiveless; the dead man was not known to have an enemy in the world, yet robbery was out of the question, for nothing had been touched.

The early tragedy was opened out. Mrs. Boyd told all she knew, which was just what she had told Elisa Minden — the affair was twenty years ago and the gallows-bird had no kith or kin left.

Elisa Minden fell into a desperate state of agitation, a swift change from her first stricken calm. She wanted Mr. Orford's house pulled down — the library and all its contents burnt. Her own wedding-dress she did burn, in frenzied silence, and none dared stop her. She resisted her father's entreaties that she should go away directly after the inquest; she would stay on the spot, she said, until the mystery was solved.

Nothing would content her but a visit to Mr. Orford's cabinet; she was resolved, she said wildly, to come to the bottom of this mystery and in that room, which she only had entered

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once and which had affected her so terribly, she believed she might find some clue.

The doctor thought it best to allow her to go; he and her cousin escorted her to the house that now no one passed without a shudder and into the chamber that all dreaded to enter.

Good Mrs. Boyd was sobbing behind them; the poor soul was quite mazed with this sudden and ghastly ending to her orderly life. She spoke incoherently, explaining, excusing, lamenting all in a breath; yet through all her trouble she showed plainly and artlessly that she had had no affection for her master, and that it was custom and habit that had been wounded, not love.

Indeed, it seemed that there was no one who did love Humphrey Orford; the lawyers were already looking for a next-of-kin. It seemed likely that this property and the estates in Suffolk would go into Chancery.

"You should not go in, my dear, you should not go in," sobbed the old woman, catching at Miss Minden's black gown (she was in mourning for the murdered man) and yet peering with a fearful curiosity into the cabinet.

Elisa looked ill and distraught, but also resolute.

"Tell me, Mrs. Boyd," said she, pausing on the threshold, "what became of the scoured silk?"

The startled housekeeper protested that she had never seen it again; and here was another touch of mystery — the old peach-coloured silk skirt that four persons had observed in Mr. Orford's cabinet the night of his murder had completely disappeared.

"He must have burnt it," said Captain Hoare; and though it seemed unlikely that he could have consumed so many yards of stuff without leaving traces in the grate, still it was the only possible solution.

"I cannot think why he kept it so long," murmured Mrs. Boyd, "for it could have been no other than Mrs. Orford's best gown."

"A ghastly relic," remarked the young soldier grimly.

Elisa Minden went into the middle of the room and stared about her; nothing in the place was changed, nothing disordered; the desk had been moved round to allow of the scholar being carried away, his chair stood back, so that the long panel on which hung the picture of the gallows was fully exposed to view.

To Elisa's agitated imagination this portion of the wall, sunk in the surrounding bookshelves, long and narrow, looked like the lid of a coffin.

"It is time that picture came down," she said; "it cannot interest anyone any longer."

"Lizzie, dear," suggested her father gently, "had you not better come away? This is a sad and awful place."

"No," replied she. "I must find out about it — we must know."

And she turned about and stared at the portrait of Flora Orford.

"He hated her, Mrs. Boyd, did he not? And she must have died of fear — think of that! — died of fear, think-

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ing all the while of that poor body on the gallows. He was a wicked man and whoever killed him must have done it to revenge Flora Orford."

"My dear," said the doctor hastily, "all that was twenty years ago and the man was quite justified in what he did, though I cannot say I should have been so pleased with the match if I had known this story."

"How did we ever like him?" muttered Elisa Minden. "If I had entered this room before, I should never have been promised to him — there is something terrible in it."

"And what else can you look for, my dear," snivelled Mrs. Boyd, "in a room where a man has been murdered?"

"But it was like this before," replied Miss Minden; "it *frightened* me."

She looked round at her father and cousin, and her face was quite distorted.

"There is something here now," she said, "something in this room."

They hastened towards her, thinking that her overstrained nerves had given way; but she took a step forward.

Shriek after shriek left her lips.

With a quivering finger she pointed before her at the long panel behind the desk. At first they could not tell at what she pointed; then Captain Hoare saw the cause of her desperate terror.

It was a small portion of faded, peach-coloured silk showing above the ribbed line of the wainscot, protruding from the wall like a fragment of stuff shut in a door.

"She is in there!" cried Miss Minden. "In there!"

A certain frenzy fell on all of them; they were in a confusion, hardly knowing what they said or did. Only Captain Hoare kept some presence of mind and, going up to the panel, discerned a fine crack all round.

"I believe it is a door," he said, "and that explains how the murderer must have struck — from the wall."

He lifted up the picture of the hanged man and found a small knob or button, which, as he expected, sent the panel back into the wall, disclosing a secret chamber no larger than a cupboard.

And directly inside this hidden room, that was dark to the sight and noisome to the nostrils, was the body of a woman, leaning against the inner wall with a white kerchief knotted tightly round her throat, showing how she had died; she wore the scoured silk skirt, the end of which had been shut in the panel, and an old ragged bodice of linen that was like dirty parchment; her hair was grey and scanty, her face past any likeness to humanity, her body thin and dry.

The room, which was lit by a window only a few inches square looking on to the garden, was furnished with a filthy bed of rags and a stool, with a few tattered clothes; a basket of broken bits was on the floor.

Elisa Minden crept closer.

"It is Flora Orford," she said, speaking like one in a dream.

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They brought the poor body down into the room, and then it was clear that this faded and terrible creature had a likeness to the pictured girl who smiled from the canvas over the mantelpiece.

And another thing was clear, and for a moment they did not dare speak to each other.

For twenty years this woman had endured her punishment in the wall chamber in the library that no one but her husband entered; for twenty years he had kept her there, behind the picture of her lover, feeding her on scraps, letting her out only when the household was abed, amusing himself with her torture — she mending the scoured silk she had worn for twenty years, sitting there, cramped in the almost complete darkness, a few feet from where he wrote his elegant poetry.

"Of course she was crazy," said Captain Hoare at length, "but why did she never cry out?"

"For a good reason," whispered Dr. Minden, when he had signed to Mrs. Boyd to take his fainting daughter away. "He saw to that — *she has got no tongue.*"

The coffin bearing the nameplate "Flora Orford" was exhumed, and found to contain only lead; it was substituted by another containing the wasted body of the woman who died by her own hand twenty years after the date on the mural tablet to her memory.

Why or how this creature, certainly become idiotic and dominated entirely by the man who kept her prisoner, had suddenly found the resolution and skill to slay her tyrant and afterwards take her own life (a thing she might have done any time before) was a question never solved.

It was supposed that he had formed the hideous scheme to complete his revenge by leaving her in the wall to die of starvation while he left with his new bride for abroad, and that she knew this and had forestalled him; or else that her poor lunatic brain had been roused by the sound of a woman's voice as she handled the scoured silk which the captive was allowed to creep out and mend when the library door was locked. But over these matters and the details of her twenty years' suffering, it is but decent to be silent.

Lizzie Minden married her cousin, but not at St. Paul's, Covent Garden. Nor did they ever return to the neighbourhood of Humphrey Orford's house.

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P. Moran — the Correspondence-School Crime-Buster — the Mail-Order Manhunter — the Defective Detective De Luxe — P. Moran, Operative (of Shetland Yard) who was created especially for EQMM back in 1943, when we were looking for a contemporary colleague of nostalgic old Philo Gubb, the Adam of correspondence-school "deteckatives" . . . Nearly all of Pete's misadventures appeared in these pages until that sad day when his creator, Percival Wilde, distinguished playwright, short-story writer, and novelist, tired of his blundering bloodhound, and nothing we could do or say would persuade Mr. W. to bring Pete out of ratiocinative retirement.

But there are other influences at work in this world to protect the faithful reader. Out in Hollywood someone saw the possibilities of P. Moran as a radio character, and since the Juggernaut of Radio eats up one story per week, it became desirable to add to Pete's memoirs, and in the classic 'tec tradition, implement his "return." So, here is the first of what we hope will become a brand-new series about P. Moran, the fallacious ferret, the inaccurate investigator, the mistaken manhunter, who, in the words of his book publisher, "converts UTTER CONFUSION into COMPLETE CHAOS at the drop of a clue."

P. MORAN, PERSONAL OBSERVER

by PERCIVAL WILDE

FROM: *Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York.*

TO: *Operative P. Moran,*
c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

. . . from which the pupil will learn the importance of personal observation.

"This is the man!" says the young detective. There is resolution in his voice and pride in his bearing.

The Police Lieutenant, the Police Captain, even the Police Commissioner tremble in awe. "How do you know?" they stammer.

"It is because I, disguised as a Major-General of Marines, saw the Senator abstract the wallet from the hip-pocket of the sleeping Good-Humor Man!"

This is a hypothetical case. You will ask, "How can such things be?" and the answer is, "Seeing is Believing! An Ounce of Observation is Worth a Pound of Deduction!"

When you are working on a case

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think of nothing else but the case!

Be there! Keep your eyes open! If you see it with your own eyes, it is so!

J. J. O'B.

P.S. A medical book is no use to you without a background of medical education, because you will not know what the hard words mean. Can you define "cranium," "epigonium," "sternum"? Of course not. If you find our course difficult, ask questions: we will answer them. That is what we are here for.

N.B. On account of rising costs, our charges for these lessons have been increased to Five Dollars each.

Be sure to register mail containing cash.

FROM: *Operative P. Moran,*
c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

TO: *Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York.*

Well, here I am again, and I guess Intermediate Observation is what I want, because Elementary Observation is too easy, and Advanced Observation will not do any good especially when you have not sent me that Lesson yet so I do not know what is in it. And I am returning the note to N. B. which was at the end of your letter because my initials are P. M., and I hope N. B. is a sucker and he will pay you anything you ask.

Well, this afternoon I am in the garage, and I am whistling, because next week I am going to start on my vacation, when the boss walks in and the missus is with him.

The boss says, "Peter, we wish to consult you on business, so we might as well make ourselves comfortable before we begin," and I says, "Yes, Mr. McRae," and I wipe off the sofa with the busted springs and the chair which are in the half of the garage which is my office, and they are just starting to sit down when the missus gives a squeal and says, "Oh, Peter, is this stack of papers I see here your lessons from the Correspondence School, and oh, Peter, I do so want to skim through them, and Peter, you will not mind if I read just a few pages while Mr. McRae tells you about the new case, and I don't have to listen because I know all about it already?"

I says, "Just like a medical book which is of no use to you without a background of medical education, because you will not know that 'cranium' means 'spine' until the perfessor tells you, those lessons are hard to understand if you are not a regular student in the Acme International Detective Correspondence School which is in South Kingston, N. Y."

"Not really, Peter?"

"Yes, Mrs. McRae; but if you find something difficult, ask questions and I will answer them."

"Oh, *will* you, Peter?"

So she grabs all the lessons, and the boss gives me the wink to come outside, and he says, "Peter, there is no denying that you have been successful in a number of your investigations,

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which I would be the last to deny, so I will not deny it."

"Yes, Mr. McRae."

"And now I will tell you about a case which has arisen at the Surrey Country Club, where I used to play tennis when I was younger, but where I now play golf because I am older, and I will brain the first man that says golf is an old man's game which it is not. . . . Do you know Mrs. Stannard Cutler?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Mrs. Chas. B. Rominton?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you think of them?"

"They are a couple of nice old ladies."

"There has been bitter rivalry between them for years. Mrs. Rominton is what we call a consistent golfer. She can shoot the course under ninety any time she wants to."

"That is nice going for an old lady."

"Don't interrupt me, Peter. Mrs. Cutler is less consistent. She has been known to shoot eighty-three. She has also been known to wind up at a hundred or even a hundred and ten. . . . You may now make your remark, Peter."

"If what they tell me about the game is true, eighty-three is pretty hot golf for a grandmother."

"It would be, but our course is only nine holes, and when the ladies have played around it once, they call it a day. Peter, with your mathamatical bent, you will instantly calculate that they average ten or eleven strokes a hole, which is seven or eight on the short ones which you could play with a mallet or a whistbroom maybe, and a dozen or more apiece on the three long holes, that is if they do not lose their balls, or bury them beyond recovery when they are blasting them out of the traps. After they have played a round the links looks like it has been hit by a couple of bombs."

I think that over. When the boss or the missus goes to the Country Club, they do not need a chauffeur, so I do not go there, especially because the only member of the opposite sect who has a regular job at the Country Club is Annie Pierce, who works in the women's locker-room, and she is sixty if she is a day, so you will not find her name in my date-book. And when I go to the post office and see the golf pro and the tennis pro and the caddie-master, you can bet they are not talking about the grandmothers and the scores the grandmothers made, which is why I do not know about Mrs. Stannard Cutler and Mrs. Chas. B. Rominton and the other things the boss tells me later.

"Peter, it would not suprise you to learn that when two ladies play games which are practicly even, which means sometimes they finish nine holes all square, and sometimes they do not finish, having had a fight and having torn up their score-cards, there is great rivalry between them."

"Why should that be, Mr. McRae?"

"Nobody has ever settled which of them is the rottenest golfer in the club."

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"Mr. McRae, does anybody care?"

"The ladies do — and yesterday they decided they would have it out. They would play nine holes — for money: a side bet of twenty-five cents — and that would decide the question for all time. Do you follow me, Peter?"

"Yes, sir."

"They showed up at the club at 9:30 A.M. which was this morning. They were already dressed for the game. They got their clubs out of the ladies' locker-room. Mrs. Stannard Cutler was wearing a diamond and emerald bracelet half an inch wide. She put it in her locker and locked it up. Mrs. Chas. B. Rominton was wearing the engagement ring which Mr. Rominton gave her years ago when he was just a young transportation maggot owning only one railroad, and it is set with a hunk of ice the size of a cough drop. She was afraid it would interfere with her grip or something, so she also put it in her locker and locked it up. Then they hired one caddie for the two of them, and they went out to play whatever game it is they play when they are on the golf course.

"When they came back at noon or thereabouts they were not on speaking terms. Mrs. Rominton said Mrs. Cutler kicked her ball a couple of times when she thought Mrs. Rominton wasn't watching, and Mrs. Cutler said Mrs. Rominton shot seventeen and not fifteen on the dog's-leg seventh which Mrs. Rominton said she won. The match ended even up: the ladies were tied. Then they went to their lockers to get their jewelry."

"It was gone?"

"Peter, with the rare intelligence which always characterizes your mental processes, you have anticipated the point, else why would I waste my time and yours telling you this tale? They opened their lockers, and Mrs. Cutler said, 'Bless my soul!' Then Mrs. Rominton said, 'I would have sworn I put it here!' Then they forgot they weren't talking to each other, and Mrs. Cutler said, 'Your ring, Bessie?' and Mrs. Rominton said, 'Your bracelet, Minnie?' and Mrs. Cutler said, 'Vanished into thin air,' because air is always thinner after diamonds vanish into it."

"Could I ask a question, Mr. McRae? What was the jewelry worth?"

"The two pieces together? Fifteen thousand — maybe twenty."

I whistled. "That's a lot of money!"

"The ladies, Peter, are not actresses. They are the wives of extremely wealthy men. The valuations are doubtless those agreed on with the insurance companies."

I could see what was coming. "You don't have to say another word, Mr. McRae. They don't want any scandal, so they didn't telephone the police. They want a celebrated detective like Operative P. Moran, who always works quietly and who never fails. So they telephoned you, and you told them you would see if I was busy. Well, how much is the reward?"

The boss laughs. "That is brilliant, Peter, excepting you are wrong on

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every count! The ladies are not afraid of scandal. What scandal can possibly hurt a couple of grandmothers? They want their jewelry. They phoned their husbands, long distance, right from the club, and their husbands got action with a capital 'A.' The State Police sent Alonzo Pratt, the trooper who foiled the Surrey Bank robbery a couple of years ago. He was cruising in a radio car, and he reached the club in less than ten minutes. Mr. Cutler sent up the chief of the detective force which works for his bank. The chief arrived early this afternoon, just beating two men hired by Mr. Rominton, who chartered an airplane for them and had them flown to the landing field which is in Lakeville. The insurance companies sent up their own operatives. There are so many sleuths at the Country Club right now that they really ought to have a convention."

"Then why did they call me in, Mr. McRae?"

Just then the missus comes out of the garage, laughing that silvery laugh of hers. "It was my idea, Peter."

"Yours, Mrs. McRae?"

"Just a hunch. You always begin by writing the Chief Inspector."

"Yes, Mrs. McRae."

"Well, let's."

P.S. Mrs. McRae says it's all right if your telegram comes collect.

COLLECT TELEGRAM
PETER MORAN
C/O MR. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN.
IF REGULAR DETECTIVES ARE ON THE JOB IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR YOU TO START ON YOUR VACATION AT ONCE STOP IF YOU GO BARGING IN AND IF YOU MENTION THE NAME OF THIS SCHOOL WE WILL SUE YOU FOR DAMAGES
CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

FROM: *Operative P. Moran,*
c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

TO: *Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York.*

Last night I says to the missus, "Maybe it would be a good idea if we drove down to the Country Club so I could do some personal observation," and she says, "Nix!"

"Nix?"

"That was the word. Having skimmed through the lessons, I am already using the lingo of regular operatives. No. Peter, I kept away from the Country Club this afternoon, and we will keep away from it tonight, because the detectives from New York will be busy grilling the three suspects — "

"Three suspects?"

"The two men and one woman who have master-keys opening all the lockers, and we must not interfere with their simple pleasures."

So I sneak down alone. I ride past the entrance on my bike. I can see the club at the end of the private road, and Mrs. McRae is right: all of the lights are burning, and there are men with flashlights along the drive. And

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on the way home I pass Mr. Cutler's house, and the lights are burning there, too, like they are at Mr. Rominton's, and I guess they are turning those houses upside down just to make sure the old ladies told the truth, and didn't forget their jewelry when they went to the club to play.

In the morning, when your telegram came, the missus says, "Very well, Peter, we will not mention the school, which he will regret, something tells me, but now is the time for some personal observation." We start for the club in the coupe. "Peter, you will be asking me who are the suspects."

"All right, Mrs. McRae, I will ask you that if that is what you want."

"You name them."

"Dave Taylor."

"Not a suspect."

"Why not?"

"The caddie-master. He doesn't have a master-key to the lockers. The same applies to old Ben Willett, the new greenskeeper, who has a grand time riding the power-mower up and down the fairways now that he's given up that fifty-year long job of mowing the village green."

"Were they there yesterday morning?"

"Yes, Peter. I found it out by making a few telephone calls. Dave was at the door of the caddie-shack, chewing gum and whittling away at a piece of wood, as usual."

"Dave is a dumn cluck."

"True — how true! Once I asked him if he ever read a book — he has lots of time on his hands — and he just looked at me in that foolish way of his, and said, "Uh?"

"Ben Willett isn't dumn."

"Certainly not; but the ladies passed him at the fifth hole. He touched his hat to them, and then he went on adjusting the little screws on the lawn mower. Ben isn't so good on his legs any more, but he rides the mower as if he were a cowboy."

"The caddies?"

"The ladies took him along. *Him*, Peter. I do believe they might have been reckless and hired two, but there was only one there."

"There are the members of the club, especially the women members."

"No, Peter."

"No?"

"Aside from the fact that they don't have master-keys, there was the Grimshaw dance the night before. Everybody under sixty was there, and it lasted until after three in the morning. The flappers, and the debs, and the young marrieds didn't begin to show up at the club until mid-afternoon, and even then they were yawning, I heard. The two old ladies were the only women members there in the morning."

"That leaves Annie Pierce."

"Exactly: suspect number one. She's in charge of the women's locker-room. Daily, almost hourly, women forget their rings when they take them off to wash their hands, and daily, almost hourly, Annie runs after them to give them back, or locks them

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up in her own locker until she can catch the owners. She cleans up in the shower, too, after the younger women have used it, and nearly every day she finds something they've forgotten."

"She's a suspect, anyhow."

The missus shakes her head. "I hate to think what they did to her last night! But yesterday she had a bad tooth, and she went to the dentist. She didn't show up at the club until nearly noon, and what's more, Dave Taylor saw her walking up the drive."

"There's Mr. MacIlvaine."

"Suspect number two: the golf pro. He's a terror on golf balls: when it's a question of a golf ball, it's finders-keepers; but there's never a week he doesn't turn in something really valuable that he's picked up on the links: a wallet with money in it; a watch; old Mr. Seymour's false teeth. Accuse Mr. Mac, and any jury will acquit him. So will I. So would you. What's more, he was practicing approach shots on the extra hole across the road when the ladies started off, and he was still at it when they came back."

"That leaves Arlo Bates."

"The tennis instructor: the third suspect, who's been with us only this season, and who comes from somewhere out west. Arlo's a nice boy who worked his way through college and graduated with a Phi Beta Kappa."

"What is that, Mrs. McRae?"

"It means he's bright, Peter. It's a gold key that doesn't open lockers."

"He has a master-key, though."

"Undoubtedly — and he visits the women's locker-room, after hours, to collect rackets he's been told to restring — or to leave those he's finished. But Arlo says he was giving a lesson to the Metcalfe twins yesterday: Douglas, ten to eleven, and Tommy, eleven to twelve, and if that's true — Oh, oh, Peter, I do believe I've got it!"

I jumped so we almost went into a ditch. "You've got what, ma'am?"

We are on the club's private driveway, and Trooper Alonzo Pratt is flagging us with a hand the size of a ham. The missus whispers to me: "Peter, don't repeat a word of what I said!" Then she speaks to the trooper. "Yes, officer?"

"Good morning, Mrs. McRae. Would you mind leaving your car at the new parking sign, and walking the rest of the way to the club? Yep. If you're wearing any jewelry, leave it in the glove compartment. I'll be keeping my eye on everything. Yep."

"What's the idea, officer?"

Alonzo Pratt knows both of us, so he don't mind telling. "I was on the job less than ten minutes after they phoned yesterday. Yep. I figured the thief still had the goods on him, so I didn't let anybody leave the place. Then, when the detectives came, they brought along a machine which they set up in that little canvas tent near the road. Yep."

"What kind of machine, officer?"

He lowers his voice. "X-ray, ma'am. Everybody has got to walk in front of it on the way out. If any rings or bracelets try to go by, they'll catch

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'em. Yep. Nobody leaves the grounds without they walk past that machine. Pretty smart, ain't it?"

The missus makes a face. "Don't the members object?"

"Only one so far, ma'am: Mr. Seymour. But they marched him in front of the machine anyhow, and they found out he was wearing a corset. Yep!"

The missus laughs that silvery laugh of hers. "Poor old man! But I take it that the loot, if that's the word, has not been found."

The trooper helps the missus out of the car. "No, ma'am, it ain't, or I'd be back in Canaan, where I belong. Yep. But mark my word, Mrs. McRae, nobody stole nothing! The ladies left the ring and the bracelet home: they only thought they took 'em to the club. Yep. Now, if you'll give me the keys, Pete, I'll lock up the car myself. . . ."

The moment we're safe past him I turns to the missus. "You know who did it, Mrs. McRae?"

"Forget it, Peter! Forget it! I only thought so. You know, a woman's intuition . . ."

"But if you'd just tell me the name, ma'am, maybe I could get to work, and I could help you . . ."

The missus picks up a score card that somebody had dropped on the drive. "Peter, write your initials on this . . . Right. Now, I'll write the name on the other side . . . There, I've done it. I'll give this to you when we all know the answer, and your initials will prove this is the same card . . ." and that is all I can get out of her.

There are strange men everywhere, and they give signals to each other as we walk by them. "Detectives," the missus whispers, "isn't it exciting?"

We can hear the "put-put" of the big power-mower, and we can see Ben Willett riding it over a hill not far from the club. Dave Taylor is sitting outside the caddie-shack, and he is whittling as usual. Mr. MacIlvaine is sitting on the steps of the clubhouse, and he is holding his head in both hands.

"Good morning, Mr. Mac," says the missus.

He stands up slow, like his joints need oiling. "An' is it th' morrnin'?" he says. "I hae no sleepit a weenk all th' necht."

His wife lives with him in the golf house, next to the ninth green. "Why don't you go to bed now, Mr. Mac?" says the missus.

"They've been searrchin' ma hoos, ma'am, an' they're no feenished with it yet."

"Did they find anything, Mr. Mac?"

"Yes, ma'am: th' dime I lost mysel' a year ago! I hunted for that dime more than six months, ma'am, an' I couldna find it."

We walked into the clubhouse.

A detective at the door took our names but didn't stop us.

"Peter, we ought to do some personal observing in the women's locker-room. I'll see if there's any-

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body in there." She is back in a moment. "Coast's clear, Peter."

There is nobody in the room excepting Annie Pierce, who is crying, and she never stops. "Don't take it so hard, Annie," the missus says, but Annie goes on crying. "Peter, have a good look."

That's what I'm doing. There are a lot of tall, steel lockers, and they look shaky, with the paint peeling off, and they are arranged around three sides of the room. I have got a question, but the missus answers it before I can ask it: "You can see for yourself who owns each locker: our cards are in the little slots. This is Mrs. Rominton's. She owns that ring with the wonderful diamond. It's so big that if anybody else wore it nobody would believe it was real. This is Mrs. Cutler's: the emerald and diamond bracelet: small stones, but oh, such lovely ones!"

"Did they leave them on those top shelves, Mrs. McRae?"

"Probably — where you can see them through the wire netting. Think of it, Peter: not twenty four hours ago, and that beautiful bracelet and that incredible diamond were in those lockers!"

I duck into a little room at one side. There is an old-fashioned shower with a long pull chain, and there is a new-fashioned door to the shower-stall with frosted glass down to a couple of inches above the floor.

"This is something of which we're really ashamed," the missus says. "The shower must be as old as the club itself, and when they put in the glass door, that left the valves for the hot and cold water outside. You have to fix the temperature by guess, and then, when you pull the chain, you always find you've guessed wrong. We plan to rip it out and put in two up-to-date showers this winter."

I says, "Yes, Mrs. McRae," because I am beginning to have an idea, especially when I see there is a little window with blue glass at the end of the room. By and by the missus goes out, and I try that window: it slides open and shut real easy, and there is not any lock on it.

When I walk back into the locker-room the missus has been putting things in order in her own locker. She locks it, and she leads the way into the big room with the platform at one end where they have all the parties and the dances and the celebrations. "And now, where is Arlo Bates?" He is not on the porch, and he is not on the tennis courts. "Peter, it's your turn: see if he's in the men's locker-room."

That is where he is, all right, and he is fast asleep. He is stretched out on a bench with a couple of sweaters under his head. The Metcalfe twins are sitting on the floor with their fingers on their lips, and one of them whispers, "Ssh, Peter!"

I tip-toe out, and I tell the missus.

"Sleeping at a time like this? Perhaps that's the best thing to do. The detectives must have given him a hard night . . . Now we want to see the caddie."

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"The caddie, Mrs. McRae?"

"Who carried the golf bags."

We walk across to the caddie-shack, and Dave Taylor quits whittling long enough to answer a couple of questions. "Yes'm, it was Bobby Hunter. He was the only caddie that showed up yesterday mornin'. Yes'm, the others had sense enough to know there wouldn't be nobody here after the dance the night before."

"Well, where is Bobby now?"

"Out on the links, ma'am. Yes'm, that kid's after all the money he can get. Yesterday the detecatives searched him right down to the skin, but that didn't bother him none: he says you got to expect queer things when you work for them old ladies."

The missus stands off and looks at him. "Dave, you saw Annie Pierce walk up that drive yesterday?"

"Yes'm."

"Just before noon? How did you know the time?"

"Well, I ain't got no watch, but you see that big clock on the wall? Yes'm, they put it in so's there wouldn't be no arguments how long a caddie's been out, an' my job's to give 'em a slip with the time on it when they start, an' then I figger the time when they come back."

"You're positive it was noon?"

"Noon, or a quarter before: I work in quarter hours, 'cause minutes is too hard."

The missus stares at him again. "Dave, think carefully. Who did you see first: Bobby Hunter, the caddie, or Annie Pierce?"

"Well, ma'am, I wouldn't rightly know how to answer that. Bobby come here from the ninth hole. He's carried bags for them ladies before, an' he didn't want no trouble with 'em."

"Was that after you saw Annie?"

"Maybe — maybe not."

"Or was it before?"

"Ma'am, I just disremember. I sit here all day. Sometimes I look this way, an' sometimes I look that; but I don't know which way I look fust. I marked Bobby's slip — that's my job, ma'am — an' he went off with it."

"After he'd collected, I suppose he threw it away."

"Like as not."

"At noon — or a quarter before noon . . . Dave, could it be possible that you're brighter than you look?"

Dave gives her a grin. "Some says it's one way, ma'am, an' some says it's t'other. What do you think?"

We walk through the little tent where they have got the X-ray machine. It don't take them more than a minute to pass us, and it don't hurt a bit.

Alonzo Pratt is waiting with the keys, and we start home.

The missus lights a cigarette. "A penny for your thoughts, Peter."

"Annie could have been in the locker-room before the ladies got back."

"Yes."

"Not very long."

"Two or three minutes would have been long enough, Peter."

"Arlo was giving tennis lessons just

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outside. He could have left the Metcalfe kids for longer than two or three minutes."

"True — how true!"

"Mr. Mac was on the other side of the road — alone. He could have gone inside with his master-key, and nobody would have noticed."

"Peter, you are incapable of falsehood!"

"They could have swiped the stuff — any one of the three — and if they didn't, Alonzo Pratt is right: the old ladies left their jewelry home, and it wasn't stolen."

"But it *was* stolen, Peter! There's no earthly doubt about it: it *was* stolen!" She shakes her head. "Peter, think of it! With that X-ray machine working, the thief didn't dare leave with the jewelry. It isn't on anybody, because everybody's been searched. It's hidden — hidden within fifty feet of the women's locker-room — or in the locker-room itself — and we can't lay our hands on it!"

"Well, if it's like that, I'm having an idea . . ."

"Out with it, Peter."

"What this case needs is Personal Observation. Like it says in the lesson, 'Be There! Seeing is Believing! An Ounce of Observation is Worth a Pound of Deduction.' Now, if I was to sneak back later on, and hide myself in the women's locker-room . . ."

"*Peter!*"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Fortunately there's no place where a man could hide."

"Oh, yes, there is, Mrs. McRae: the shower-room is right next door."

"Peter, you're not really serious?"

"If I could hide there, and see what goes on . . ."

"Peter, have you gone quite mad? Do you realize that the locker-room is the place where women get undressed? Do you know that when they go into the shower-room, they are quite — I mean, Peter, they are — they are not wearing a stitch of clothing!"

"I would do like it says in the lesson: I would disregard everything excepting what is absolutely sensual."

The missus starts to laugh, and then she starts to rock back and forth, and she is laughing so hard I can see the tears in her eyes. "Peter! I used to think you had no sense of humor! Peter, I take it all back! Peter, I've never heard anything so funny in all my life! Wait till I tell Mr. McRae how you fooled me: hiding in the shower-room — to see what you can see there — disregarding everything except — except . . ."

Well, maybe the missus thinks I was fooling when I left her at the front entrance of the house, but if that is what she thinks, she has got another think coming, because tonight, when it is dark, I am going to the Country Club, and I hung a white towel in the window of the shower-room so I will know that window from the outside.

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Like I said before, Personal Observation is what this case needs.

TELEGRAM

MRS. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN. PLEASE ADVISE PLACE AND DATE OF FUNERAL STOP WE WILL SEND FLOWERS

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

FROM: *Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.*

TO: *Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York*

The doctor says I can't go out till the fever goes down, but the missus says that is all right, and she will take this letter to the post office. And I wish you would let me know who is dead, because if the school is going to send flowers, that lets me out, I guess, and I do not have to pay for any myself, especially if it is N. B., only I do not know the dope who has got those initials.

The missus thought I was joking yesterday, but when Operative P. Moran says he is going to do something, that is what he is going to do, and you can bet your bottom dollar on it. Last night I set my alarm clock for 4 A.M. in the morning, because it is dark so early in September, and when it woke me up I rubbed some soot all over my face and my hands, which is something I read in a story about fighting Indians, and they always do it because it makes it harder for them to see you in the dark. Then I got on my bicycle, and I rode to the entrance of the club.

There was no moon, but there was starlight, and I could see one of those gumshoes sitting on a chair next to the drive, especially when he lit his pipe. But I didn't stop. I kept on riding till I was clear on the other side of the club, where they would have a back entrance only they do not have a back entrance, and then I hid the bike in some bushes, and I began to wriggle through the shrubbery and the high grass towards the clubhouse, which I could see plain because they had left one light burning on the porch.

It was a long wriggle, all of two hundred yards, I guess, and I must have wriggled right through a patch of poison ivy, because my hands and my face were all swollen up when the doctor came, and they would be swollen worse, he says, if it hadn't been for the soot which was on them, which shows the Indians knew what they were doing. But when I got near the club I saw the towel I left hanging out of the little window in the shower-room, and I eased that window open and climbed through without hurting myself on a big nail which I didn't know was there until I felt something rip, and it was the seat of my pants.

Like I wrote you, there was only one place to hide: in the shower-bath. My eyes were used to the dark, and I could see it pretty well. I pushed open the glass door without making a

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sound. I walked into the corner of the shower-stall, and I sat down to wait for morning. It says in one of the lessons, "The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime." That was what I wanted to see by Personal Observation.

Well, it was nice and warm in there, and there was a lovely smell of perfume because so many women had bathed in that shower, and the floor was not any harder than other floors, and I must have dozed off, because the next thing I knew I was hearing the voices of a lot of girls, and some of them were angry, and they were saying, "We ought to kill him!" but some of them were giggling and laughing, and they were talking so fast that I could not make out what they were saying.

The room was light now, with electric lights burning in the ceiling, and some more light coming in through the blue glass in the window. I stood up slow, never making a sound, and I pushed the glass door gently. It didn't open. I pushed harder. It stayed shut, and I couldn't budge it. I did not understand that, because I knew there was not any lock on that door, so I got down on my hands and knees and looked under the glass, and I could see why that door would not open, and it was because somebody had piled benches from the locker-room right outside of it, and when I tried to push those benches, they would not move either, because they went clear to the wall, and they were jammed tight.

I figured out somebody was trying to play a trick on me, and then I was sure of it when I saw a woman's hand with a golf club, and it was snaking out the pull-chain of the shower.

I says, "Excuse me, miss," and then somebody says, "Hurry up! He's awake! Yes, he's awake!" and somebody else says, "Give it to him, but good!" and then the chain tightens, and gallons of ice-water start pouring out of that shower right on my head.

I try to get away from the water, but the stall is too small. It is coming down like pitchforks, and it is splashing against all three walls and against the glass door, too. My uniform is heavy whipcord, and I am wearing leather puttees, but I am soaked to the skin in nothing flat.

A girl's voice screams, "Is it too cold for you, Peter? Poor Peter! We'll fix it!" and then the water starts getting warmer — and hotter — and hotter, and the voice screams, "There you are, Peter! In hot water! You ought to be used to that!"

They don't ease up on the hot water till the steam makes the air so thick I can't see through it, and then the shower starts spouting ice-water again — and then hot water — and then ice-water once more.

I try to grab the pull-chain. It is too high, though I jump as high as I can. The hot water comes down — and the ice-water — through a hundred spouts on the big nickel-plated head.

I yell, "Quit it!"

They laugh at me.

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I jump again. I catch the shower-head. I hold onto it, and it comes off in my hands, and then there is just one big pipe shooting out a solid stream, and I can stand to one side of that.

And then I hear the voice of the boss, half angry and half laughing, "Cut it out! Cut it out! Do you want to kill him? Stop it! You can't kill him without ruining the dance floor! The water is running all over it!"

The water stops. The benches are pulled away. The glass door opens.

I come out, still holding on to that shower-head. I walk through the women's locker-room, sloshing water. I walk into the big social hall: it is inch-deep in water, and crowded on the platform at one end of the dance-floor there must be fifty people, with more coming every minute: the missus; Arlo Bates; Mr. Mac and his wife; Annie Pierce; Dave Taylor; old Ben Willett; Mrs. Cutler; Mrs. Rominton; a dozen men I didn't know, but I can spot them for detectives; any number of young men and young women. They told me afterwards that Miss Betty Auchincloss saw me sleeping in the shower when she went to the club to take a tennis lesson at nine o'clock. She phoned her friends, and they helped her drag out the benches and wedge the door shut, and while they were doing that, some of them phoned practicly everybody else in the club.

Most of the folks are laughing and screaming, but one of the young men is saying, "We're going to take him outside and lynch him!" when the missus cuts in, "Look! Look!"

Well, I am the only one there who can't look at me, but I knew what I looked like, soaked clear through, soot all over everything, the seat of my pants gone, and my hands and face starting to swell from the poison ivy.

But it isn't me that the missus is looking at. She screams again, "Look! Look!" and she points at the shower-head which I have got in my hands, and there, right on top where everybody can see them now, stuck on with big hunks of chewing gum, are Mrs. Rominton's ring and Mrs. Cutler's bracelet!

One of the detectives barks, "Lock all the doors!"

The missus comes right over and takes a close look. *She* doesn't mind getting her feet wet in the water. And then she says, "This is going to be easy." She has got that sheaf of lessons in her hand, and she is riffling through them. "Lesson Twenty-Five: Fingerprints. Listen, everybody: 'Fingerprints in gum may be preserved by alternate applications of hot and cold water.' First we're going to take the fingerprints of every living soul in this room, and then . . ."

But Dave Taylor cuts in: "I know when the game's up. I done it."

TELEGRAM

MRS. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN.

PLEASE STATE ON WHICH PAGE OF LESSON TWENTY-FIVE YOU FOUND QUOTE FINGERPRINTS IN GUM MAY BE PRE-

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SERVED BY ALTERNATE APPLICATIONS OF HOT AND COLD WATER UNQUOTE WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND SUCH A STATEMENT BUT ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH THIS NEW AND VALUABLE PROCESS STOP WOULD YOU CONSIDER BECOMING A MEMBER OF OUR FACULTY QUESTION MARK FIFTY WORD REPLY IS PREPAID

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

FROM: *Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.*

TO: *Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York*

I am sneezing regular, but the fever has gone down, so the doctor says I can go out, which suits me fine, especially when everybody is saying, "Pete, how did you do it?" excepting the new redhead they have hired at Mrs. Grimshaw's, and she is saying, "Peter, you wonderful man, what are you doing Thursday evening?"

Even the detectives came moseying up to the garage before they started back to the city, and one of the insurance fellows says, "Mr. Moran, naturally you will be receiving checks from both insurance companies," and I says, "Naturally," and he goes on, "Look me up when you come to town. If you should ever want a job, we will have an opening for you," and I says, "Naturally, naturally."

I says to the missus, "What will we tell them, Mrs. McRae?" and she laughs that silvery laugh of hers, and says, "Peter, who am I to advise you in your perfession? You and I know it was a simple case."

"Yes, it was that."

"We began by eliminating all the suspects."

"All of them?"

"All of them — until you expanded the list. We eliminated the caddie: he met the ladies outside the club, and when they came back, he went posthaste to the caddie-master to have his time checked. He knew there'd be an argument otherwise. Then, even after he had been searched, he came back to work the next morning. That wasn't the act of a guilty youngster."

"I knew he was innocent all along, ma'am."

"Of course you did! . . . We eliminated Ben Willett. He was working on the links, far, far from the clubhouse. He's shaky, and it would have taken him an age to walk half a mile — and when he rides the power-mower back at the end of the day, it makes such a racket that everybody looks up and says, 'Oh, hello, Ben!' "

"Ben wasn't a suspect."

"Everybody was, to you! Oh, Peter, I'm so grateful! . . . We discussed Mr. Mac."

"Mr. Mac is honest."

"We all agree he's honest — and a man who spends six months searching for a lost dime has a sense of property too strong to be tempted by a ring and a bracelet."

"Annie Pierce . . ."

"She had a perfect alibi. I phoned

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the dentist, who could say to the minute when she left his office. Dave told the truth when he said she walked up the drive at either a quarter to twelve or twelve. It happened to be twelve, and I knew it — but Dave told his story in such a way that it didn't clear Annie."

"Arlo Bates . . ."

"He took a lot of eliminating! It was the key that did it."

"The master-key?"

"The Phi Beta Kappa key. The natural suspect, because he's been with us only a couple of months; but the key says he's bright: very, very bright! To steal the bracelet and the ring: that wasn't the act of a bright man. The bracelet, yes: there were dozens of stones that could have been pried out of their settings and sold one at a time; but the ring, with one enormous diamond: where would the thief sell it?"

"That's what I have been asking myself, Mrs. McRae."

"Again, to rob just one locker would have been smart, because with the other untouched, nobody would have believed that Mrs. Cutler had worn the bracelet to the club, and she wouldn't have been sure of it herself. The insurance company would have settled, because they cover against all risks; but with two lockers opened, it was theft and it had to be theft. Arlo would never have made the mistake the thief did."

"That leaves Dave Taylor."

"Whose name *you* mentioned first, Peter!"

"Did I, Mrs. McRae?"

"Peter, don't be so modest — though I wasn't far behind." She hands me the score card on which I have written my initials. It is "Dave" she has written on the other side. "I hadn't even considered him at the beginning. He was sitting outside the caddie-shack when the ladies started out. He was there again when they returned, and he had to be there to check Bobby Hunter's time; but he's the one man who always knows when the coast is clear, and he could pick and choose the moment to do a little grand larceny! What's more, he lacks Arlo's brains: when he saw Mrs. Rominton's ring, sparkling at him from her top shelf, it didn't occur to him that he could make himself safe by leaving it there!"

"He didn't have a master-key."

"That didn't stop us long, did it, Peter? I wondered if one was really necessary. The lockers are old. While you were in the shower-room, I tried my key on three lockers: it opened two of them. The reason we never knew that before was because nobody had ever tried it: we're honest folk."

"The members lose keys every summer . . ."

"They do, Peter."

"Dave found one."

"Of course — and he gave up four more when they asked him if the one was all he had."

A smart woman, the missus. If I keep on teaching her, she'll be a real detective some day. "But the fingerprints — in the chewing gum?"

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"Peter," she says, "the moment I saw the jewelry, I hoped and I prayed for them; but when I looked closer, I saw that the hot water had melted the gum, and there wasn't a print anywhere. So I staked everything on a bold, bad bluff: I said hot and cold water preserved fingerprints — which they don't — and Dave Taylor was so thick that he believed me and confessed." She looks at me with a smile, and I guess it is the first time I ever noticed what a pretty woman she is. "Peter, here are your lessons. Thank you for them. I learned a lot from you on this case. But to join the faculty of the school? Write them that I'm just a beginner."

Miss Betty Auchincloss met me with what she called a committee when I drove the missus to the Country Club this afternoon. The missus says, "Peter, you are to drive." I guess she knew what was coming.

Miss Betty says, "Peter, you had no business hiding in the shower, but then we had no business trying to drown you, first in cold water, and then in hot. We apologize. I apologize for all of us."

I sneezed, like I have been doing regular all day. I says, "Miss Betty, your apology is accepted."

"We decided to buy you a little present, to show you there isn't any hard feeling. This is it, Peter." She holds out a plush case.

"What is it, Miss Betty?"

The whole committee is starting to laugh. "It's what they call an oyster watch, Peter. It is waterproof. You can wear it when you go in swimming. You will find it useful the next time you are in a shower."

I am wearing it this moment.

That is how I can tell it is now six minutes and forty-one seconds since I sneezed.

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Ernest Bramah's "The Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage" is the seventeenth story of THE GOLDEN TWENTY *— the twenty best detective-crime short stories, by twenty different authors, as selected by a special panel of critics, connoisseurs, and constant readers . . .*

Herschel and Rae Sandberg of Philadelphia called our attention to some veiled descriptions of famous detectives, given by Hwa-Che in Ernest Bramah's THE RETURN OF KAI LUNG:

"One finds his requirements met by an inconspicuous grey cell, in which solitude he can doubtless best invoke the Expounding Forces . . .

"[Another] sits in an angle of the wall apart and by means of knotted cords disentangles all involvements . . .

"One of priestly cast tests innocence and guilt by parallelism of appropriate Symbols, through which he brings everything to a highly satisfactory conclusion, though without any very clear indication of the actual process . . .

"A High Excellence of noble rank becomes inspired on rare and costly scrolls, choice wine and apparel of unique distinction . . .

"The foremost of the band, whose mere name has now become a synonym for alertness, inhales the acrid fumes of smouldering weeds, and wraps about his form a flowing robe of talismanic virtues. He it is who also calls up attending Shapes by means of forbidden drugs and restores the harmonious balance of the Spheres with a machine of wood and string . . ."

Perhaps not so veiled — for surely you have identified the "distinguishers between truth and delusive error"?

THE TRAGEDY AT BROOKBEND COTTAGE

by ERNEST BRAMAH

"MAX," said Mr. Carlyle, when Parkinson had closed the door behind him, "this is Lieutenant Hollyer, whom you consented to see."

"To hear," corrected Carrados, smiling straight into the healthy and rather embarrassed face of the stranger before him. "Mr. Hollyer knows of my disability?"

"Mr. Carlyle told me," said the young man, "but, as a matter of fact, I had heard of you before, Mr. Carrados, in connection with the foundering of the *Ivan Saratov*."

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Carrados wagged his head in good-humored resignation.

"And the owners were sworn to inviolable secrecy!" he exclaimed. "Well, it is inevitable, I suppose. Not another scuttling case, Mr. Hollyer?"

"No, mine is quite a private matter," replied the lieutenant. "My sister, Mrs. Creake — but Mr. Carlyle would tell you better than I can."

"No, no; Carlyle is a professional. Let me have it in the rough, Mr. Hollyer. My ears are my eyes."

"Very well, sir. I can tell you what there is to tell, right enough, but I feel that when all's said and done it must sound very little to another, although it seems important to me."

"We have occasionally found trifles of significance ourselves," said Carrados encouragingly.

Lieutenant Hollyer began: "I have a sister, Millicent, who is married to a man called Creake. She is about twenty-eight now and he is at least fifteen years older. Neither my mother (who has since died) nor I cared very much about Creake. We had nothing particular against him, except, perhaps, the disparity of age, but none of us appeared to have anything in common. He was a dark, taciturn man, and his moody silence froze up conversation. As a result, of course, we didn't see much of each other."

"This, you must understand, was four or five years ago, Max," interposed Mr. Carlyle officiously.

Lieutenant Hollyer continued: "Millicent married Creake after a very short engagement. It was a frightfully subdued wedding — more like a funeral to me. The man professed to have no relations and apparently he had scarcely any friends or business acquaintances. He was an agent for something or other and had an office off Holborn. I suppose he made a living out of it then, although we knew practically nothing of his private affairs, but I gather that it has been going down since, and I suspect that for the past few years they have been getting along almost entirely on Millicent's little income. You would like the particulars?"

"Please," assented Carrados.

"When our father died about seven years ago, he left six thousand pounds. It was invested in Canadian stock and brought in a little over two hundred a year. By his will my mother was to have the income of that for life and on her death it was to pass to Millicent, subject to the payment of a lump sum of five hundred pounds to me. But my father privately suggested to me that if I should have no particular use for the money at the time, he would propose my letting Millicent have the income of it until I did want it, as she would not be particularly well off. You see, Mr. Carrados, a great deal more had been spent on my education and advancement than on her; I had my pay, and, of course, I could look out for myself better than a girl could."

"Quite so," agreed Carrados.

"Therefore I did nothing about that," continued the lieutenant. "Three years ago I was over again but

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I did not see much of them. They were living in lodgings. That was the only time since the marriage that I have seen them until last week. In the meanwhile our mother had died and Millicent had been receiving her income. She wrote me several letters at the time. Otherwise we did not correspond much, but about a year ago she sent me their new address — Brookbend Cottage, Mulling Common — a house that they had taken. When I got two months' leave I invited myself there as a matter of course, fully expecting to stay most of my time with them, but I made an excuse to get away after a week. The place was dismal and unendurable, the whole life and atmosphere indescribably depressing." He looked round with an instinct of caution, leaned forward earnestly, and dropped his voice. "Mr. Carrados, it is my absolute conviction that Creake is only waiting for a favorable opportunity to murder Millicent."

"Go on," said Carrados quietly. "A week of the depressing surroundings of Brookbend Cottage would not alone convince you of that, Mr. Hollyer."

"I am not so sure," declared Hollyer doubtfully. "There was a feeling of suspicion and — before me — polite hatred that would have gone a good way towards it. All the same there *was* something more definite. Millicent told me this the day after I went there. There is no doubt that a few months ago Creake deliberately planned to poison her with some weed-killer. She told me the circumstances in a rather distressed moment, but afterwards she refused to speak of it again — even weakly denied it — and, as a matter of fact, it was with the greatest difficulty that I could get her at any time to talk about her husband or his affairs. The gist of it was that she had the strongest suspicion that Creake doctored a bottle of stout which he expected she would drink for her supper when she was alone. The weed-killer, properly labeled, but also in a beer bottle, was kept with other miscellaneous liquids in the same cupboard as the beer, but on a high shelf. When he found that it had miscarried he poured away the mixture, washed out the bottle, and put in the dregs from another. There is no doubt in my mind that if he had come back and found Millicent dead or dying he would have contrived it to appear that she had made a mistake in the dark."

"Yes," assented Carrados. "The open way, the safe way."

"You must understand that they live in a very small style, Mr. Carrados, and Millicent is almost entirely in the man's power. The only servant they have is a woman who comes in for a few hours every day. The house is lonely and secluded. Creake is sometimes away for days and nights at a time, and Millicent, either through pride or indifference, seems to have dropped off all her old friends and to have made no others. He might poison her, bury the body in the garden, and be a thousand miles away before

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anyone began even to inquire about her. What am I to do?"

"He is less likely to try poison than some other means now," pondered Carrados. "That having failed, his wife will always be on her guard. He may know, or at least suspect, that others know. No. . . . The common-sense precaution would be for your sister to leave the man, Mr. Hollyer. She will not?"

"No," admitted Hollyer, "she will not. I at once urged that." The young man struggled with some hesitation for a moment and then blurted out: "The fact is, Mr. Carrados, I don't understand Millicent. She is not the girl she was. She hates Creake and treats him with a silent contempt that eats into their lives like acid, and yet she is so jealous of him that she will let nothing short of death part them. It is a horrible life they lead. I stood it for a week and I must say, much as I dislike my brother-in-law, that he has something to put up with. If only he got into a passion like a man and killed her it wouldn't be altogether incomprehensible."

"That does not concern us," said Carrados. "In a game of this kind one has to take sides and we have taken ours. It remains for us to see that our side wins. You mentioned jealousy, Mr. Hollyer. Have you any idea whether Mrs. Creake has real ground for it?"

"I should have told you that," replied Lieutenant Hollyer. "I happened to strike up with a newspaper-man whose office is in the same block as Creake's. When I mentioned the name he grinned. 'Creake,' he said, 'oh, he's the man with the romantic typist, isn't he?' 'Well, he's my brother-in-law,' I replied. 'What about the typist?' Then the chap shut up like a knife. 'No, no,' he said, 'I didn't know he was married. I don't want to get mixed up in anything of that sort."

Carrados turned to his friend.

"I suppose you know all about the typist by now, Louis?"

"We have had her under efficient observation, Max."

"Is she unmarried?"

"Yes; so far as ordinary repute goes."

"That is all that is essential for the moment. Mr. Hollyer opens up three excellent reasons why this man might wish to dispose of his wife. Well, we will go forward on that. Have you got a photograph of Mr. Creake?"

The lieutenant took out his pocket-book.

"Mr. Carlyle asked me for one. Here is the best I could get."

Carrados rang the bell.

"This, Parkinson," he said, when the man appeared, "is a photograph of a Mr. — What first name, by the way?"

"Austin," said Hollyer.

"— of a Mr. Austin Creake. I may require you to recognize him."

Parkinson glanced at the print and returned it to his master's hand.

"May I inquire if it is a recent photograph of the gentleman, sir?" he asked.

"About six years ago," said the lieutenant. "But he is very little changed."

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"Thank you, sir. I will endeavor to remember Mr. Creake, sir."

Lieutenant Hollyer stood up as Parkinson left the room. The interview seemed to be at an end.

"Oh, there's one other matter," he remarked. "I am afraid that I did rather an unfortunate thing while I was at Brookbend. It seemed to me that as all Millicent's money would probably pass into Creake's hands sooner or later I might as well have my five hundred pounds, if only to help her with afterwards. So I broached the subject and said that I should like to have it now as I had an opportunity for investing."

"And you think?"

"It may possibly influence Creake to act sooner than he otherwise might have done. He may even have got possession of the principal and find it very awkward to replace it."

"So much the better. If your sister is going to be murdered it may as well be done next week or two. Excuse my brutality, Mr. Hollyer, but this is simply a case to me and I regard it strategically. Now Mr. Carlyle's organization can look after Mrs. Creake for a few weeks, but it cannot look after her forever. By increasing the immediate risk we diminish the permanent risk."

"I see," agreed Hollyer. "I'm awfully uneasy but I'm entirely in your hands."

"Then we will give Mr. Creake every inducement and every opportunity to get to work. Where are you staying now?"

"Just now at St. Albans."

"That is too far." The inscrutable eyes retained their tranquil depth but a new quality of quickening interest in the voice made Mr. Carlyle sit up. "Give me a few minutes, please. The cigarettes are behind you, Mr. Hollyer." The blind man walked to the window and seemed to look out over the cypress-shaded lawn. The lieutenant lit a cigarette and Mr. Carlyle picked up *Punch*. Then Carrados turned round again.

"You are prepared to put your own arrangements aside?" he demanded of his visitor.

"Certainly."

"Very well. I want you to go down now — straight from here — to Brookbend Cottage. Tell your sister that your leave is unexpectedly cut short and that you sail tomorrow."

"The *Martian*?"

"No, no; the *Martian* doesn't sail. Look up the movements on your way there and pick out a boat that does. Say you are transferred. Add that you expect to be away only two or three months and that you really want the five hundred pounds by the time of your return. Don't stay in the house long, please."

"I understand, sir."

"St. Albans is too far. Make your excuse and get away from there today. Put up somewhere in town, where you will be in reach of the telephone. Let Mr. Carlyle and myself know where you are. Keep out of Creake's way. I don't want actually to tie you down to the house, but we may require

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your services. We will let you know at the first sign of anything doing. . . ."

"Is there nothing more that I can do now?"

"Nothing. In going to Mr. Carlyle you have done the best thing possible; you have put your sister into the care of the shrewdest man in London."

"Well, Max?" remarked Mr. Carlyle tentatively when they were alone.

"Well, Louis?"

"Of course, it wasn't worth while rubbing it in before young Hollyer, but, as a matter of fact, every single man carries the life of any other man — only one, mind you — in his hands, do what you will."

"Provided he doesn't bungle," acquiesced Carrados.

"Quite so."

"And also that he is absolutely reckless of the consequences."

"Of course."

"Two rather large provisos. Creake is obviously susceptible to both. Have you seen him?"

"No. As I told you, I put a man on to report his habits in town. Then, two days ago, as the case seemed to promise some interest — for he certainly is deeply involved with the typist, Max, and the thing might take a sensational turn at any time — I went down to Mulling Common myself. Although the house is lonely it is on the electric tram route — you know the sort of market-garden rurality about a dozen miles out of London — alternate bricks and cabbages. It was easy enough to get to know about Creake locally. He mixes with no one there, goes into town at irregular times but generally every day, and is reputed to be devilish hard to get money out of. Finally, I made the acquaintance of an old fellow who used to do a day's gardening at Brookbend occasionally. He has a cottage and a garden of his own with a greenhouse, and the business cost me the price of a pound of tomatoes."

"Was it a profitable investment?"

"As tomatoes, yes; as information, no. The old fellow had the fatal disadvantage from our point of view of laboring under a grievance. A few weeks ago Creake told him that he would not require him again as he was going to do his own gardening."

"That is something, Louis."

"However, the chatty old soul had a simple explanation for everything that Creake did. Creake was mad. He had even seen him flying a kite in his garden where it was bound to get wrecked among the trees. A lad of ten would have known better, he declared."

"A good many men have been flying kites of various kinds lately," said Carrados. "Is he interested in aviation?"

"I daresay. He appears to have some knowledge of scientific subjects. Now what do you want me to do, Max?"

"Will you do it?"

"Implicitly."

"Keep your man on Creake in town and let me have his reports after you have seen them. Lunch with me here now. Phone your office that you are detained on unpleasant business and

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then give the deserving Parkinson an afternoon off by looking after me while we take a motor run round Mulling Common. If we have time we might go on to Brighton, feed at the 'Ship,' and come back in the cool."

"Amiable and thrice lucky mortal," sighed Mr. Carlyle.

But, as it happened, Brighton did not figure in that day's itinerary. It had been Carrados' intention merely to pass Brookbend Cottage on this occasion, relying on his highly developed faculties, aided by Mr. Carlyle's description, to inform him of the surroundings. A hundred yards before they reached the house he had given an order to his chauffeur to drop into the lowest speed and they were leisurely drawing past when a discovery by Mr. Carlyle modified their plans.

"By Jupiter!" that gentleman suddenly exclaimed, "there's a board up, Max. The place is to be let."

Carrados picked up the tube again. A couple of sentences passed and the car stopped by the roadside, a score of paces past the limit of the garden. Mr. Carlyle took out his notebook and wrote down the address of a firm of house agents.

"You might raise the hood and have a look at the engine, Harris," said Carrados. "We want to be occupied here for a few minutes."

"This is sudden; Hollyer knew nothing of their leaving," remarked Mr. Carlyle.

"All the same, Louis, we will go on to the agents and get a card to view whether we use it today or not."

A thick hedge, in its summer dress effectively screening the house beyond from public view, lay between the garden and the road. Above the hedge showed an occasional shrub; at the corner nearest to the car a chestnut flourished. The wooden gate, once white, which they had passed, was grimed and rickety. The road itself was still the unpretentious country lane that the advent of the electric tram had found it. When Carrados had taken in these details there seemed little else to notice. He was on the point of giving Harris the order to go on when his ear caught a trivial sound.

"Someone is coming out of the house, Louis," he warned his friend. "It may be Hollyer."

"I don't hear anyone," replied the other, but as he spoke a door banged noisily and Mr. Carlyle slipped into another seat and ensconced himself behind a copy of *The Globe*.

"Creake himself," he whispered across the car, as a man appeared at the gate. "Hollyer was right; he is hardly changed. Waiting for the tram, I suppose."

But the tram very soon swung past them from the direction in which Mr. Creake was looking and it did not interest him. For a minute or two longer he continued to look expectantly along the road. Then he walked slowly up the drive back to the house.

"We will give him five or ten minutes," decided Carrados. "Harris is behaving very naturally."

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Before even the shorter period had run out they were repaid. A telegraph boy cycled leisurely along the road, and, leaving his machine at the gate, went up to the cottage. Evidently there was no reply, for in less than a minute he was trundling past them back again. Round the bend an approaching tram clanged its bell noisily, and, quickened by the warning sound, Mr. Creake again appeared, this time with a small portmanteau in his hand. With a backward glance he hurried on towards the next stopping-place, and boarded the car as it slackened down.

"Very convenient of Mr. Creake," remarked Carrados, with quiet satisfaction. "We will now get the order and go over the house in his absence. It might be useful to have a look at the telegram as well."

"It might, Max," acquiesced Mr. Carlyle. "But if it is, as it probably is, in Creake's pocket, how do you propose to get it?"

"By going to the telegraph office."

"Quite so. Have you ever tried to see a copy of a telegram addressed to someone else?"

"I don't think I have ever had occasion yet," admitted Carrados. "Have you?"

"In one or two cases I have perhaps been an accessory to the act. It is generally a matter either of extreme delicacy or considerable expenditure."

"Then for Hollyer's sake we will hope for the former."

A little later, having left the car at the beginning of the straggling High Street, the two men called at the village telegraph office. They had already visited the house agent and obtained an order to view Brookbend Cottage, declining with some difficulty the clerk's persistent offer to accompany them. The reason was soon forthcoming. "As a matter of fact," explained the young man, "the present tenant is under *our* notice to leave."

"Unsatisfactory, eh?" said Carrados, encouragingly.

"He's a corker," admitted the clerk, responding to the friendly tone. "Fifteen months and not a bit of rent have we had. That's why I should have liked —"

"We will make every allowance," replied Carrados.

The telegraph office occupied one side of a stationer's shop. It was not without some inward trepidation that Mr. Carlyle found himself committed to the adventure. Carrados, on the other hand, was the personification of bland unconcern.

"You have just sent a telegram to Brookbend Cottage," he said to the young lady behind the brass-work lattice. "We think it may have come inaccurately and should like a repeat." He took out his purse. "What is the fee?"

The request was evidently not a common one. "Oh," said the girl uncertainly, "wait a minute, please." She turned to a pile of telegram duplicates behind the desk and ran a doubtful finger along the upper sheets. "I think this is all right. You want it repeated?"

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"Please."

"It will be fourpence. If there is an error the amount will be refunded."

Carrados put down his coins.

"Will it take long?" he inquired.

"You will most likely get it within a quarter of an hour," she replied.

"Now you've done it," commented Mr. Carlyle, as they walked back to their car. "How do you propose to get that telegram, Max?"

"Ask for it."

And stripping the artifice of any elaboration, he simply asked for it and got it. The car, posted at a convenient bend in the road, gave him a warning note as the telegraph-boy approached. Then Carrados took up a convincing attitude with his hand on the gate while Mr. Carlyle lent himself to the semblance of a departing friend. That was the inevitable impression when the boy rode up.

"Creake, Brookbend Cottage?" inquired Carrados, holding out his hand, and without a second thought the boy gave him the envelope.

"Some day, my friend," remarked Mr. Carlyle, looking nervously towards the unseen house, "your ingenuity will get you into a tight corner."

"Then my ingenuity must get me out again," was the retort. "Let us have our 'view' now. The telegram can wait."

An untidy workwoman took their order and left them standing at the door. Presently a lady whom they both knew to be Mrs. Creake appeared.

"You wish to see the house?" she said, in a voice that was utterly devoid of any interest. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned to the nearest door and threw it open.

"This is the drawing-room."

They walked into a sparsely furnished, damp-smelling room and made a pretense of looking round.

"The dining-room," she continued, crossing the narrow hall.

Mr. Carlyle ventured a genial commonplace in the hope of inducing conversation. The result was not encouraging. Doubtless they would have gone through the house under the same frigid guidance had not Carrados been at fault in a way that Mr. Carlyle had never known him fail before. In crossing the hall he stumbled over a mat and almost fell.

"Pardon my clumsiness," he said to the lady. "I am, unfortunately, quite blind."

"Blind!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I beg your pardon. Why did you not tell me? You might have fallen."

"I generally manage fairly well," he replied. "But, of course, in a strange house —"

She put her hand on his arm very lightly.

"You must let me guide you," she said.

The house, without being large, was full of passages and inconvenient turnings. Carrados asked an occasional question and found Mrs. Creake quite amiable without effusion. Mr. Carlyle followed them from room to room in the hope, though scarcely the expec-

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tation, of learning something that might be useful.

"This is the last one. It is the largest bedroom," said their guide. Only two of the upper rooms were fully furnished and Mr. Carlyle at once saw, as Carrados knew without seeing, that this was the one which the Creakes occupied.

"A very pleasant outlook," declared Mr. Carlyle.

"Oh, I suppose so," admitted the lady vaguely. The room, in fact, looked over the leafy garden and the road beyond. It had a French door opening onto a small balcony, and to this, under the strange influence that always attracted him to light, Carrados walked.

"I expect that there is a certain amount of repair needed?" he said, after standing there a moment.

"I am afraid there would be," she confessed.

"I ask because there is a sheet of metal on the floor here," he continued. "Now that, in an old house, spells dry-rot to the wary observer."

"My husband said that the rain, which comes in a little under the window, was rotting the boards there," she replied. "He put that down recently. I had not noticed anything myself."

It was the first time she had mentioned her husband; Mr. Carlyle pricked up his ears.

"Ah, that is a less serious matter," said Carrados. "May I step out onto the balcony?"

"Oh, yes, if you like to." Then, as he appeared to be fumbling at the catch, "Let me open it for you."

But the window was already open, and Carrados, facing the various points of the compass, took in the bearings.

"A sunny, sheltered corner," he remarked. "An ideal spot for a deck-chair and a book."

"I daresay," she replied, "but I never use it."

"Sometimes, surely," he persisted mildly. "It would be my favorite retreat. But then —"

"I was going to say that I had never even been out on it, but that would not be quite true. It has only two uses for me: occasionally I shake a duster from it, and when my husband returns late without his latchkey he wakes me up and I come out here and drop him mine."

Further revelation of Mr. Creake's nocturnal habits was cut off, greatly to Mr. Carlyle's annoyance, by a cough of unmistakable significance from the foot of the stairs. They had heard a trade cart drive up to the gate, a knock at the door, and the heavy-footed woman tramp along the hall.

"Excuse me a minute, please," said Mrs. Creake.

"Louis," said Carrados, in a sharp whisper, the moment they were alone, "stand against the door."

With extreme plausibility Mr. Carlyle began to admire a picture so situated that while he was there it was impossible to open the door more than a few inches. From that position he observed his confederate go through

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the curious procedure of kneeling down on the bedroom floor and for a full minute pressing his ear to the sheet of metal that had already engaged his attention. Then he rose to his feet, nodded, dusted his trousers, and Mr. Carlyle moved to a less equivocal position.

"What a beautiful rose-tree grows up your balcony," remarked Carrados, stepping into the room as Mrs. Creake returned. "I suppose you are very fond of gardening?"

"I detest it," she replied.

"But this *Gloire*, so carefully trained —?"

"Is it?" she replied. "I think my husband was nailing it up recently." By some strange fatality Carrados' most aimless remarks seemed to involve the absent Mr. Creake. "Do you care to see the garden?"

The garden proved to be extensive and neglected. Behind the house was chiefly orchard. In front, some semblance of order had been kept up; here it was lawn and shrubbery, and the drive they had walked along. Two things interested Carrados: the soil at the foot of the balcony, which he declared on examination to be particularly suitable for roses, and the fine chestnut-tree in the corner by the road.

As they walked back to the car Mr. Carlyle lamented that they had learned so little of Creake's movements.

"Perhaps the telegram will tell us something," suggested Carrados.

Mr. Carlyle cut open the envelope, glanced at the enclosure, and in spite of his disappointment could not restrain a chuckle.

"My poor Max," he explained, "you have put yourself to an amount of ingenious trouble for nothing. Creake is evidently taking a few days' holiday and prudently availed himself of the Meteorological Office forecast before going. Listen: *Immediate prospect for London warm and settled. Further outlook cooler but fine.* Well, well; I did get a pound of tomatoes for *my* fourpence."

"You certainly scored there, Louis," admitted Carrados. "I wonder," he added speculatively, "whether it is Creake's peculiar taste usually to spend his week-end holiday in London."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, looking at the words again. "By gad, that's rum, Max. They usually go to Weston-super-Mare. Why on earth should he want to know about London?"

"I can make a guess, but before we are satisfied I must come here again. Take another look at that kite, Louis. Are there a few yards of string hanging loose from it?"

"Yes, there are."

"Rather thick string — unusually thick for the purpose?"

"Yes; but how do you know?"

As they drove home again Carrados explained, and Mr. Carlyle sat aghast, saying incredulously: "Good God, Max, is it possible?"

An hour later he was satisfied that it was possible. In reply to his inquiry

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someone in his office telephoned him the information that "they" had left Paddington by the four thirty for Weston.

It was more than a week after his introduction to Carrados that Lieutenant Hollyer had a summons to present himself at the Carrados home again. He found Mr. Carlyle already there and the two friends awaiting his arrival.

"I hope everything is all right?" he said, shaking hands.

"Excellent," replied Carrados. "You'd better eat something before we start. We have a long and perhaps an exciting night before us."

"And certainly a wet one," assented the lieutenant. "It was thundering over Mulling way as I came along."

"That is why you are here," said his host. "We are waiting for a certain message before we start, and in the meantime you may as well understand what we expect to happen. As you saw, there is a thunderstorm coming on. The Meteorological Office forecast predicted it for the whole of London if the conditions remained. Within an hour it is now inevitable that we shall experience a deluge. Here and there damage will be done to trees and buildings; here and there a person will probably be struck and killed."

"Yes."

"It is Mr. Creake's intention that his wife should be among the victims."

"I don't exactly follow," said Hollyer, looking from one man to the other. "I quite admit that Creake would be immensely relieved if such a thing did happen, but the chance is surely an absurdly remote one."

"Yet unless we intervene it is precisely what a coroner's jury will decide has happened. Do you know whether your brother-in-law has any practical knowledge of electricity, Mr. Hollyer?"

"I cannot say. He was so reserved, and we really knew so little of him —"

"Yet in 1896 an Austin Creake contributed an article on 'Alternating Currents' to the American *Scientific World*."

"But do you mean that he is going to direct a flash of lightning?"

"Only into the minds of the doctor who conducts the post-mortem, and the coroner. This storm, the opportunity for which he has been waiting for weeks, is merely the cloak to his act. The weapon which he has planned to use — scarcely less powerful than lightning but much more tractable — is the high-voltage current of electricity that flows along the tram wire at his gate."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lieutenant Hollyer.

"Some time between eleven o'clock tonight — about the hour when your sister goes to bed — and one thirty in the morning — the time up to which he can rely on the current — Creake will throw a stone up at the balcony window. Most of his preparation has long been made; it only remains for him to connect up a short length to the window handle and a

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longer one at the other end to tap the live wire. That done, he will wake his wife in the way I have said. The moment she moves the catch of the window — and he has carefully filed its parts to ensure perfect contact — she will be electrocuted as effectually as if she sat in the executioner's chair in Sing Sing prison."

"But what are we doing here!" exclaimed Hollyer, starting to his feet, pale and horrified. "It is past ten now and anything may happen."

"Quite natural, Mr. Hollyer," said Carrados, reassuringly, "but you need have no anxiety. Creake is being watched, the house is being watched, and your sister is as safe as if she slept tonight in Windsor Castle. Be assured that whatever happens he will not be allowed to complete his scheme; but it is desirable to let him implicate himself to the fullest limit. Your brother-in-law, Mr. Hollyer, is a man with a peculiar capacity for taking pains."

"He is a damned cold-blooded scoundrel!" exclaimed the young officer fiercely. "When I think of Millicent five years ago —"

"Well, for that matter, an enlightened nation has decided that electrocution is the most humane way of removing its superfluous citizens," suggested Carrados, mildly. "He is certainly an ingenious-minded gentleman. It is his misfortune that in Mr. Carlyle he was fated to be opposed by an even subtler brain —"

"No, no! Really, Max!" protested the embarrassed gentleman.

"Mr. Hollyer will be able to judge for himself when I tell him that it was Mr. Carlyle who first drew attention to the significance of the abandoned kite," insisted Carrados, firmly. "Then, of course, its object became plain to me — as indeed to anyone. For ten minutes, perhaps, a wire must be carried from the overhead line to the chestnut-tree. Creake has everything in his favor, but it is just within possibility that the driver of an inopportune tram might notice the appendage. What of that? Why, for more than a week he has seen a derelict kite with its yards of trailing string hanging in the tree. A very calculating mind, Mr. Hollyer. It would be interesting to know what line of action Mr. Creake has mapped out for himself afterwards. I expect he has half a dozen artistic little touches up his sleeve. Possibly he would merely singe his wife's hair, burn her feet with a red-hot poker, shiver the glass of the French door, and be content with that to let well alone. You see, lightning is so varied in its effects that whatever he did or did not do would be right. He is in the impregnable position of the body showing all the symptoms of death by lightning shock and nothing else but lightning to account for it — a dilated eye, heart contracted in systole, bloodless lungs shrunk to a third the normal weight, and all the rest of it. When he has removed a few outward traces of his work Creake might quite safely 'discover' his dead wife and rush off for the nearest doctor. Or he may

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have decided to arrange a convincing alibi, and creep away, leaving the discovery to another. We shall never know; he will make no confession."

"I wish it was over," admitted Hollyer.

"Three more hours at the worst, Lieutenant," said Carrados, cheerfully. "Ah-ha, something is coming through now."

He went to the telephone and received a message from one quarter; then made another connection and talked a few minutes.

"Everything working smoothly," he remarked between times over his shoulder. "Your sister has gone to bed, Mr. Hollyer."

Then he turned to the house telephone and distributed his orders.

"So we," he concluded, "must get going."

By the time they were ready a large closed motor-car was waiting. The lieutenant thought he recognized Parkinson in the well-swathed form beside the driver, but there was no temptation to linger on the steps. Already the stinging rain had lashed the drive into the semblance of a frothy estuary; all around the lightning jagged its course through the incessant tremulous glow of more distant lightning, while the thunder only ceased its muttering to turn at close quarters and crackle viciously.

"One of the few things I regret missing," remarked Carrados, tranquilly; "but I hear a good deal of color in it."

"We are not going direct?" suddenly inquired Hollyer, after they had traveled perhaps half a dozen miles.

"No; through Hunscott Green and then by a field path to the orchard at the back," replied Carrados. "Keep a sharp lookout for the man with the lantern about here, Harris," he called through the tube.

"Something flashing just ahead, sir," came the reply, and the car slowed down and stopped.

Carrados dropped the near window as a man in glistening waterproof stepped from the shelter of a lich-gate and approached.

"Inspector Beedel, sir," said the stranger, looking into the car.

"Quite right, Inspector," said Carrados. "Get in."

"I have a man with me, sir."

"We can find room for him."

"We are very wet."

"So shall we all be soon."

The lieutenant changed his seat and the two burly forms took places side by side. In less than five minutes the car stopped again, this time in a grassy country lane.

"Now we have to face it," announced Carrados. "The inspector will show us the way."

The car slid round and disappeared into the night, while Beedel led the party to a stile in the hedge. A couple of fields brought them to the Brookbend boundary. There a figure stood out of the black foliage, exchanged a few words with their guide and piloted them along the shadows of the orchard to the back door.

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"You will find a broken pane near the catch of the scullery window," said the blind man.

"Right, sir," replied the inspector. "I have it. Now, who goes through?"

"Mr. Hollyer will open the door for us. I'm afraid you must take off your boots and all wet things, Lieutenant. We cannot risk a single spot inside."

They waited until the back door opened, then each one divested himself in a similar manner and passed into the kitchen, where the remains of a fire still burned. The man from the orchard gathered together the discarded garments and disappeared.

Carrados turned to the lieutenant.

"A rather delicate job for you now, Mr. Hollyer. I want you to go up to your sister, wake her, and get her into another room with as little fuss as possible. Tell her as much as you think fit and let her understand that her very life depends on absolute stillness when she is alone. Don't be unduly hurried, but not a glimmer of a light."

Ten minutes passed by the measure of the battered old alarm on the dresser shelf before he returned.

"I've had rather a time of it," he reported, with a nervous laugh, "but I think it will be all right now. She is in the spare room."

"Then we will take our places. You and Parkinson come with me to the bedroom. Inspector, you have your own arrangements. Mr. Carlyle will be with you."

They dispersed silently about the house. Hollyer glanced apprehensively at the door of the spare room as they passed it, but within was as quiet as the grave. Their room lay at the other end of the passage.

"You may as well take your place in the bed now, Hollyer," directed Carrados when they were inside and the door closed. "Keep well down among the clothes. Creake has to get up on the balcony, you know, and he will probably peep through the window, but he dare come no farther. Then when he begins to throw up stones slip on this dressing-gown of your sister's. I'll tell you what to do."

The next sixty minutes drew out into the longest hour that the lieutenant had ever known. Occasionally he heard a whisper pass between the two men who stood behind the window curtains, but he could see nothing. Then Carrados threw a guarded remark in his direction.

"He is in the garden now."

Something scraped slightly against the outer wall. But the night was full of wilder sounds, and in the house the boards creaked and sprang between the yowling of the wind among the chimneys, the rattle of the thunder and the pelting of the rain. It was a time to quicken the steadiest pulse, and when the crucial moment came, when a pebble suddenly rang against the pane with a sound that the tense waiting magnified into a shivering crash, Hollyer leaped from the bed on the instant.

"Easy, easy," warned Carrados, feelingly. "We will wait for another knock." He passed something across.

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"Here is a rubber glove. I have cut the wire but you had better put it on. Stand just for a moment at the window, move the catch so that it can blow open a little, and drop immediately. *Now.*"

Another stone had rattled against the glass. For Hollyer to go through his part was the work merely of seconds. But an unforeseen and in the circumstances rather horrible interval followed, for Creake, in accordance with some detail of his never-revealed plan, continued to shower missile after missile against the panes until even the unimpressionable Parkinson shivered.

"The last act," whispered Carrados, a moment after the throwing had ceased. "He has gone round to the back. Keep as you are. We take cover now."

From half a dozen places of concealment ears were straining to catch the first guiding sound. Creake moved very stealthily, burdened, perhaps, by some strange scruple in the presence of the tragedy that he had not feared to contrive, paused for a moment at the bedroom door, then opened it very quietly, and in the fickle light read the consummation of his hopes.

"At last!" they heard the sharp whisper drawn from his relief. "At last!"

He took another step and two shadows seemed to fall upon him from behind, one on either side. With primitive instinct a cry of terror and surprise escaped him as he made a desperate movement to wrench himself free, and for a short second he almost succeeded in dragging one hand into a pocket. Then his wrists slowly came together and the handcuffs closed.

"I am Inspector Beedel," said the man on his right side. "You are charged with the attempted murder of your wife, Millicent Creake."

"You are mad," retorted Creake, falling into a desperate calmness. "She has been struck by lightning."

"No, you blackguard, she hasn't," wrathfully exclaimed his brother-in-law, jumping up. "Would you like to see her?"

"I also have to warn you," continued the inspector impassively, "that anything you say may be used as evidence against you."

A startled cry from the farther end of the passage arrested their attention.

"Mr. Carrados," called Hollyer, "oh, come at once."

At the open door of the other bedroom stood the lieutenant, his eyes still turned towards something in the room beyond, a little empty bottle in his hand.

"Dead!" he exclaimed tragically, with a sob, "with this beside her. Dead just when she would have been free of the brute."

The blind man passed into the room, sniffed the air, and laid a gentle hand on the pulseless heart.

"Yes," he replied. "That, Hollyer, does not always appeal to the woman, strange to say."

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F. R. Buckley was born and educated in England, came to the United States as a member of a military mission during World War I, stayed here to become first, a newspaperman, then a scenario writer for the movies, and finally, a fiction writer on his own. When World War II exploded, he was in his late forties, but he wouldn't have missed the War That Was Supposed to End War — he served in England, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, ending up in a hospital on Staten Island. In 1948 he began functioning as "special observer" for the British Broadcasting Corporation, but at the time you read this 'tec tintype, Mr. Buckley will probably be in Paris, painting. The simple truth is, now that he is exploring his early fifties, Mr. Buckley finds the brush and microphone less tiring than the typewriter — which is always a fatiguing instrument, and let no tyro, warns Mr. Buckley, think otherwise.

F. R. Buckley's "Gold-Mounted Guns" was awarded a special prize in 1922 by the O. Henry Memorial judges and the Society of Arts and Sciences "for the best story under 3,000 words." The Committee felt that "Gold-Mounted Guns," more than any other story written in America during 1922, illustrates the O. Henry tradition. And that it does . . .

GOLD-MOUNTED GUNS

by F. R. BUCKLEY

EVENING had fallen on Longhorn City, and already, to the south, an eager star was twinkling in the velvet sky, when a spare, hard-faced man slouched down the main street and selected a pony from the dozen hitched beside Tim Geogehan's general store. The town, which in the daytime suffered from an excess of eye-searing light in its open spaces, confined its efforts at artificial lighting to the one store, the one saloon, and its neighbor, the Temple of Chance; so it was from a dusky void that the hard-faced man heard himself called by name.

"Tommy!" a subdued voice accosted him.

The hard-faced man made, it seemed, a very slight movement — a mere flick of the hand at his low-slung belt; but it was a movement perfectly appraised by the man in the shadows.

"Wait a minute!" the voice pleaded.

A moment later, his hands upraised,

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his pony's bridle-reins caught in the crook of one arm, a young man moved into the zone of light that shone bravely out through Tim Geogehan's back window.

"Don't shoot," he said, trying to control his nervousness before the weapon unwaveringly trained on him. "I'm — a friend."

For perhaps fifteen seconds the newcomer and the hard-faced man examined each other with the unwinking scrutiny of those who take chances on life and death. The younger, with that lightning draw fresh in his mind, noted the sinister droop of a gray moustache over a hidden mouth, and shivered a little as his gaze met that of a pair of steel-blue eyes. The man with the gun saw before him a rather handsome face, marred, even in this moment of submission, by a certain desperation.

"What do you want?" he asked, tersely.

"Can I put my hands down?" countered the other.

The lean man considered.

"All things bein' equal," he said, "I think I'd rather you'd first tell me how you got round to callin' me Tommy. Been askin' people in the street?"

"No," said the boy. "I only got into town this afternoon, an' I ain't a fool anyway. I seen you ride in this afternoon, and the way folks backed away from you made me wonder who you was. Then I seen them gold-mounted guns of yourn, an' of course I knew. Nobody ever had guns like them but Pecos Tommy. I could ha' shot you while you was gettin' your horse, if I'd been that way inclined."

The lean man bit his moustache.

"Put 'em down. What do you want?"

"I want to join you."

"You want to *what?*"

"Yeah, I know it sounds foolish to you, mebbe," said the young man. "But, listen — your side-kicker's in jail down in Rosewell. I figured I could take his place — anyway, till he got out. I know I ain't got any record, but I can ride, an' I can shoot the pips out of a ten-spot at ten paces, an' — I got a little job to bring into the firm, to start with."

The lean man's gaze narrowed.

"Have, eh?" he asked, softly.

"It ain't anythin' like you go in for as a rule," said the boy, apologetically, "but it's a roll of cash an' — I guess it'll show you I'm straight. I only got on to it this afternoon. Kind of providential I should meet you right now."

The lean man chewed his moustache. His eyes did not shift.

"Yeah," he said, slowly. "What you quittin' punchin' for?"

"Sick of it."

"Figurin' robbin' trains is easier money?"

"No," said the young man, "I ain't. But I like a little spice in life. They ain't none in punchin'."

"Got a girl?" asked the lean man.

The boy shook his head. The hard-faced man nodded reflectively.

"Well, what's the job?" he asked.

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The light from Geogehan's window was cut off by the body of a man who, cupping his hands about his eyes, stared out into the night, as if to locate the buzz of voices at the back of the store.

"If you're goin' to take me on," said the young man, "I can tell you while we're ridin' toward it. If you ain't — why, there's no need to go no further."

The elder slipped back into its holster the gold-mounted gun he had drawn, glanced once at the obscured window and again, piercingly, at the boy whose face now showed white in the light of the rising moon. Then he turned his pony and mounted.

"Come on," he commanded.

Five minutes later the two had passed the limits of the town, heading for the low range of hills which encircled it to the south — and Will Arblaster had given the details of his job to the unemotional man at his side.

"How do you know the old guy's got the money?" came a level question.

"I saw him come out of the bank this afternoon, grinnin' all over his face an' stuffin' it into his pants-pocket," said the boy. "An' when he was gone, I kind of inquired who he was. His name's Sanderson, an' he lives in this yere cabin right ahead a mile. Looked kind of a soft old geezer — kind that'd give up without any trouble. Must ha' been quite some cash there, judgin' by the size of the roll. But I guess when *you* ask him for it, he won't mind lettin' it go."

"I ain't goin' to ask him," said the lean man. "This is your job."

The boy hesitated.

"Well, if I do it right," he asked, with a trace of tremor in his voice, "will you take me along with you sure?"

"Yeah — I'll take you along."

The two ponies rounded a shoulder of the hill: before the riders there loomed, in the moonlight, the dark shape of a cabin, its windows unlighted. The lean man chuckled.

"He's out."

Will Arblaster swung off his horse.

"Maybe," he said, "but likely the money ain't. He started off home, an' if he's had to go out again, likely he's hid the money some place. Folks know *you're* about. I'm goin' to see."

Stealthily he crept toward the house. The moon went behind a cloudbank, and the darkness swallowed him. The lean man, sitting his horse, motionless, heard the rap of knuckles on the door — then a pause, the rattle of the latch. A moment later there came the heavy thud of a shoulder against wood — a cracking sound, and a crash as the door went down. The lean man's lips tightened. From within the cabin came the noise of one stumbling over furniture, then the fitful fire of a match illumined the windows. In the quiet, out there in the night, the man on the horse, twenty yards away, could hear the clumping of the other's boots on the rough board floor, and every rustle of the papers that he fumbled in his

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search. Another match scratched and sputtered, and then, with a hoarse cry of triumph, was flung down. Running feet padded across the short grass and Will Arblaster drew up, panting.

"Got it!" he gasped. "The old fool! Put it in a tea-canister right on the mantelshelf. Enough to choke a horse! Feel it!"

The lean man, unemotional as ever, reached down and took the roll.

"Got another match?" he asked.

Willie struck one, and, panting, watched while his companion, moistening a thumb, riffled through the bills.

"Fifty tens," said the lean man. "Five hundred dollars. Guess I'll carry it."

His cold blue eyes turned downward, and focused again with piercing attention on the younger man's upturned face. The bills were stowed in a pocket of the belt right next to one of those gold-mounted guns which, earlier in the evening, had covered Willie Arblaster's heart. For a moment, the lean man's hand seemed to hesitate over its butt; then, as Willie smiled and nodded, it moved away. The match burned out.

"Let's get out of here," the younger man urged; whereupon the hand which had hovered over the gunbutt grasped Will Arblaster's shoulder.

"No, not yet," he said quietly, "not just yet. Get on your hawss, an' set still awhile."

The young man mounted. "What's the idea?"

"Why!" said the level voice at his right. "This is a kind of novelty to me. Robbin' trains, you ain't got any chance to see results, like: this here's different. Figure this old guy'll be back pretty soon. I'd like to see what he does when he finds his wad's gone. Ought to be amusin'!"

Arblaster chuckled uncertainly.

"Ain't he liable to ——"

"He can't see us," said the lean man with a certain new cheerfulness in his tone. "An' besides, he'll think we'd naturally be miles away; an' besides that, we're mounted, all ready."

"What's that?" whispered the young man.

The other listened.

"Probably him," he said. "Now stay still."

There were two riders — by their voices, a man and a girl: they were laughing as they approached the rear of the house, where, roughly made of old boards, stood Pa Sanderson's substitute for a stable. They put up the horses; then their words came clearer to the ears of the listeners, as they turned the corner of the building, walking toward the front door.

"I feel mean about it, anyhow," said the girl's voice. "You going on living here, Daddy, while ——"

"Tut-tut-tut!" said the old man. "What's five hundred to me? I ain't never had that much in a lump, an' shouldn't know what to do with it if I had.' Sides, your Aunt Elviry didn't give it you for nothin'. 'If she wants to go to college,' says she, 'let her prove it by workin'. I'll pay half, but

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she's got to pay t'other half.' Well, you worked, an' —— Where on earth did I put that key?"

There was a silence, broken by the grunts of the old man as he contorted himself in the search of his pockets, and then the girl spoke: the tone of her voice was the more terrible for the restraint she was putting on it.

"Daddy — the — the — did you leave the money in the house?"

"Yes. What is it?" cried he.

"Daddy — the door's broken down, and ——"

There was a hoarse cry: boot heels stumbled across the boards, and again a match flared. Its pale light showed a girl standing in the doorway of the cabin, her hands clasped on her bosom — while beyond the wreckage of the door a bent figure with silver hair tottered away from the mantelshelf. In one hand Pa Sanderson held the match, in the other a tin box.

"Gone!" he cried in his cracked voice. "Gone!"

Willie Arblaster drew a breath through his teeth and moved uneasily in his saddle. Instantly a lean, strong hand, with a grip like steel, fell on his wrist and grasped it. The man behind the hand chuckled.

"Listen!" he said.

"Daddy — Daddy — don't take on so — please don't," came the girl's voice, itself trembling with repressed tears. There was a scrape of chair-legs on the floor as she forced the old man into his seat by the fireplace. He hunched there, his face in his hands, while she struck a match and laid the flame to the wick of the lamp on the table. As it burned up she went back to her father, knelt by him, and threw her arms about his neck.

"Now, now, now!" she pleaded. "Now, Daddy, it's all right."

But he would not be comforted.

"I can't replace it!" cried Pa Sanderson, dropping trembling hands from his face. "It's gone! Two years you've been away from me; two years you've slaved in a store; and now I've ——"

"Hush, hush!" the girl begged. "Now, Daddy — it's all right. I can go on working, and ——"

With a convulsive effort, the old man got to his feet. "Two years' more slavery, while some skunk drinks your money, gambles it — throws it away!" he cried. "Curse him! Whoever it is, curse him! Where's God's justice? What's a man goin' to believe when years of scrapin' like your aunt done, an' years of slavin' like yours in Laredo there, an' all our happiness today can be wiped out by a damned thief in a minute?"

"Don't, Daddy," she choked. "It only makes it worse. Come and lie down on your bed, and I'll make you some coffee. Don't cry. Please."

Gently, like a mother with a little child, she led the heartbroken old man out of the watchers' line of vision, out of the circle of lamplight. More faintly, but still with heart-rending distinctness, the listeners could hear the sounds of weeping.

The lean man sniffed, chuckled, and pulled his bridle.

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"Some circus! C'mon, boy."

His horse moved a few paces, but Will Arblaster's did not. The lean man turned in his saddle.

"Ain't you comin'?" he asked.

For ten seconds, perhaps, the boy made no answer. Then he urged his pony forward until it stood side by side with his companion's.

"No," he said. "An' — an' I ain't goin' to take that money, neither."

"Huh?"

The voice was slow and meditative.

"Don't know as ever I figured what this game meant," he said. "Always seemed to me that all the hardships was on the stick-up man's side — gettin' shot at an' chased and so on. Kind of fun, at that. Never thought 'bout — old men cryin'."

"That ain't my fault."

"No," said Will Arblaster, still very slowly. "But I'm goin' to take that money back. You didn't have no trouble gettin' it, so you don't lose nothin'."

"Suppose I say I won't let go of it?"

"Then," snarled Arblaster, "I'll blow your damned head off an' take it! Don't you move, you! I've got you covered. I'll take the money out myself."

His revolver muzzle under his companion's nose, he snapped open the pocket of the belt and extracted the roll of bills. Then, regardless of a possible shot in the back, he swung off his horse and shambled, with the mincing gait of the born horseman, into the lighted doorway of the cabin. The lean man, unemotional as ever, sat perfectly still, looking alternately at the cloud-dappled sky and at the cabin.

It was a full ten minutes before Will Arblaster reappeared in the doorway alone, and made, while silhouetted against the light, a quick movement of his hand across his eyes, then stumbled forward through the darkness toward his horse. Still the lean man did not move.

"I'm — sorry," said the boy as he mounted. "But ——"

"I ain't," said the lean man quietly. "What do you think I made you stay an' watch for, you young fool?"

The boy made no reply. Suddenly the hair prickled on the back of his neck and his jaw fell.

"Say," he demanded hoarsely at last. "Ain't you Pecos Tommy?"

The lean man's answer was a short laugh.

"But you got his guns, an' the people in Longhorn all kind of fell back!" the boy cried. "If you ain't him, who are you?"

The moon had drifted from behind a cloud and flung a ray of light across the face of the lean man as he turned it, narrow-eyed, toward Arblaster. The pallid light picked out with terrible distinctness the grim lines of that face — emphasized the cluster of sun-wrinkles about the corners of the piercing eyes and marked as if with underscoring black lines the long sweep of the fighting jaw.

"Why," said the lean man dryly, "I'm the sheriff that killed him yesterday. Let's be ridin' back."

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TOWN BLONDE, COUNTRY BLONDE

by Q. PATRICK

LIEUTENANT TIMOTHY TRANT studied the two blondes warily. They were both extravagantly beautiful; and one of them was a murderess.

One of them had just shot Joseph C. Cook III dead in his own living-room with his own Colt .32.

Trant should have been in his element. He had an unorthodox weakness for murderesses. But he was disconcerted, because he still hadn't the faintest notion which was guilty.

He'd already labeled them in his mind — these two discarded girl friends of the amatory Mr. Cook. The Town Blonde and The Country Blonde. Jennifer Towne, Mr. Cook's Town Blonde, was a fugitive from Hollywood who could have made an Internal Revenue Office glamorous with her lush curves, her red camellia mouth, her champagne shoulder-length bob. Ingeborg Lindquist, Mr. Cook's Country Blonde, personally imported by yacht from Scandinavia, was athletic, burnt-sugar brown, gorgeously independent of make-up, stirring visions of summer sailboats and Romance.

It should almost have been a privilege to be shot by either of them.

But which? They both carried gloves, so there'd be no fingerprints. And both had known where Cook kept his gun.

The Town Murderess? Or The Country Murderess?

"It would help me a lot, ladies," he suggested sadly, "if one of you could seem just a tiny bit innocent."

"I do not kill him," said Country.

"Neither did I," said Town.

At seven Lieutenant Trant and his Homicide Squad had reached Joseph Cook's hideaway Park Avenue apartment to find Dr. Bourne, the elevator boy, and the magnificent Country Blonde waiting.

Dr. Bourne said: "Mr. Cook came to my office on the ground floor at six to have his sinuses washed out and to get a penicillin shot. I'm sure of the time because he was very fussy about his health and always punctual. He left at six fifteen."

"And I brought him right up here," broke in the elevator boy. "Around six thirty Miss Towne showed up. Only stayed a couple of minutes though. Just as I took her down again, this lady arrived." He nodded to the Country Blonde.

"I knock," announced Country.

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"There is no answer. I hear a moan. Quick I ring for the elevator boy. Together we go in, we find him dead."

"Shot!" whistled the boy.

Trant turned to him. "Know where this Miss Towne lives?"

"Right here in this building."

"Get her."

The boy ran off. Later, the Medical Examiner turned from the body. "You can cut out suicide. It's murder." He tossed Trant an evening paper. "And if you want motives . . ."

Trant read a front page headline:

JOSEPH COOK, MILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY, ANNOUNCES SURPRISE ENGAGEMENT TO TEXAS HEIRESS

"Surprise is right." The Medical Examiner grinned meaningly from The Country Blonde to The Town Blonde who had just made a spectacular entrance. "Guess either of them might be pretty sore about not being that Texas heiress."

Trant now had the living-room and the two blondes to himself. Nothing had been touched. On a coffee table, a single fluted cocktail glass, with the dregs of a Martini, and a shaker, where melting ice still floated, stood in crystal transparency. Next to them, in a careless heap, lay strewn a diamond clip, two diamond rings, and a diamond bracelet.

The Country Blonde was standing by the window, frostily ignoring The Town Blonde who lounged on a pink divan.

"Well, ladies, suppose we hear those interesting stories again. Miss Towne?"

Town pouted the red camellia lips. "I read about Joe's engagement. Sure I was mad, hopping mad. And when I'm mad I do pixie things. What I did this time was to grab up all the junk the jerk had ever given me and come running over here." She pointed an elegant toe toward the heaped jewels. "When he let me in, I threw them straight in his sinus — and scrammed."

"You're sure he was alive when you left?"

"It doesn't kill you," drawled Town, "to get a load of diamonds in the kisser."

Trant had paused at the coffee table. He picked up the diamond bracelet.

"And you, Miss Lindquist, arrived only a few seconds after Miss Towne left?"

"Yes. I too read the paper and am much surprised. I telephone Mr. Cook and he asks me for a drink at six thirty — to explain, he say. I come. I knock. He does not answer. Always he is punctual, so I wait perhaps five minutes, thinking he come. Then I hear the moan. I call quick for the elevator boy and his key."

"Unshot when Miss Towne left; shot before Miss Lindquist arrived." Trant shook his head. "One of you, I'm afraid, is telling a lie."

And then, suddenly, as he let the bracelet drop on the coffee table, his self-assurance came back. Because

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now he knew. He should have known half an hour ago. Very calm now, he took out a cigarette case and offered it. Country accepted abstractedly. Town shook her head. "No minor vices."

Trant lit Country's cigarette and turned with an odd smile to Town. "No minor vices? Then perhaps . . . would you get up?"

Town rose.

"Here." Trant beckoned. "Nearer."

Dubiously she moved closer. Trant grabbed her swiftly by the waist and, pulling her toward him, kissed her full and enthusiastically on the mouth.

"Hey!" Town broke away, slapping hard at his cheek.

But Trant, beaming, had turned to a tall mirror and was surveying his own reflected mouth, grotesquely smeared with camellia red.

"Thank you, Miss Towne. A very pleasant way of getting a solution. And here it is." He moved to the coffee table and picked up the fluted cocktail glass from beside the shaker. "Someone drank this Martini recently — dregs in the glass, ice in the shaker. Now Miss Towne sheds her lipstick as freely as she sheds her jewels. Witness my mouth."

He raised the cocktail glass to the light. "Not a trace of lipstick here. She didn't have time to clean it, either. Takes too long to wipe lipstick off fluted glass." He paused. "But if Miss Lindquist, with her admirable Nordic contempt for cosmetics, had drunk it . . . "

Deftly he flicked the half-smoked cigarette from Country's hand and held it up. Its end was completely unstained.

"See? No lipstick."

"But I never come in here," flared Country. "I tell you. I keep telling you."

"I know, Miss Lindquist, but perhaps that is the lie. Perhaps you knocked and Mr. Cook let you in. Perhaps you asked him to mix you a Martini to give yourself time to get his gun. Perhaps, as he put the shaker down, you shot him. Perhaps you gulped the Martini to fortify yourself — and then ran for the elevator boy."

"But is — is crazy. It is Mr. Cook who drinks the Martini himself!"

Trant smiled. "If Mr. Cook had drunk it, there would be absolutely no case against you, Miss Lindquist. I agree."

"But he did, he did!"

"Oh, no, he didn't, he didn't!" Trant looked at her ruefully. "Mr. Cook was fussy about his health. He would never have dreamed of drinking liquor just after a sinus-treatment and a penicillin shot. And if he didn't drink it and Miss Towne didn't drink it, who else . . . ?"

Trant never really enjoyed outmaneuvering an attractive murderess.

"I can almost sympathize, Ingeborg," he murmured. "That long trip from Scandinavia — and then a Texas heiress. American dollars marrying American dollars. So inconsiderate!"

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We now bring you W. Somerset Maugham's "The Happy Couple," which we hope to be the first in a series of Maugham short stories to be reprinted in EQMM. The phrase "a series of Maugham short stories" reminds us of the motion picture called "Quartet," produced by J. Arthur Rank and released in America by Eagle-Lion. This film was based on four short stories by Mr. Maugham, and the author himself appeared in the prologue speaking the following lines:

"In one way and another I have used in my writings pretty well everything that has happened to me in the course of my life. Sometimes an experience of my own has provided me with an idea and all I have had to do is to invent the incidents to illustrate it. More often I have taken persons I know, either slightly or intimately, and used them as the foundation for characters of my own invention. To tell you the truth, fact and fiction are so intermingled in my work that now, looking back, I can hardly distinguish one from the other.

"In my twenties the critics said I was brutal, in my thirties they said I was flippant, in my forties they said I was cynical, in my fifties they said I was competent, and then in my sixties they said I was superficial. I have gone my way, with a shrug of the shoulders, following the path I have traced, trying with my work to fill out the pattern of life that I have made for myself . . ."

THE HAPPY COUPLE

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

I DON'T KNOW that I very much liked Landon. He was a member of a club I belonged to, and I had often sat next to him at lunch. He was a judge at the Old Bailey, and it was through him I was able to get a privileged seat in court when there was an interesting trial that I wanted to attend. He was an imposing figure on the bench in his great full-bottomed wig, his red robes and his ermine tippet; and with his long, white face, thin lips and pale blue eyes, a somewhat terrifying one. He was just, but harsh; and sometimes it made me uncomfortable to hear the bitter scolding he gave a convicted prisoner whom he was about to sentence to death or a long term of imprisonment. But his acid humor at the lunch table and his willingness to discuss the cases he had tried made him sufficiently

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good company for me to disregard the slight malaise I felt in his presence. I asked him once whether he did not feel a certain uneasiness of mind after he had sent a man to the gallows. He smiled as he sipped his glass of port.

"Not at all. The man's had a fair trial; I've summed up as fairly as I could, and the jury has found him guilty. When I condemn him to death, I sentence him to a punishment he richly deserves; and when the court rises, I put the case out of my head. Nobody but a sentimental fool would do anything else."

I knew he liked to talk to me, but I never thought he looked upon me as anything but a club acquaintance, so I was not a little surprised when one day I received a telegram from him saying that he was spending his vacation on the Riviera, and would like to stay with me for two or three days on his way to Italy. I wired that I should be glad to see him. But it was with a certain trepidation that I met him at the station.

On the day of his arrival, to help me out, I asked Miss Gray, a neighbor and an old friend of mine, to dinner. She was of mature age, but charming, and she had a flow of lively conversation which I knew nothing could discourage. I gave them a very good dinner, and though I had no port to offer the Judge, I was able to provide him with a good bottle of Montrachet and an even better bottle of Mouton Rothschild. He enjoyed them both; and I was glad of that, because when I had offered him a cocktail, he had refused with earnest indignation.

"I have never understood," he said, "how people presumably civilized can indulge in a habit that is not only barbarous but disgusting."

I may state that this did not deter Miss Gray and me from having a couple of dry martinis, though it was with impatience and distaste that he watched us drink them.

But the dinner was a success. The good wine and Miss Gray's sprightly chatter combined to give Landon a geniality I had never before seen in him. It was plain to me that notwithstanding his austere appearance he liked feminine society; and Miss Gray in a becoming dress, with her neat head only just touched with gray and her delicate features, her sparkling eyes, was still alluring. After dinner the Judge, with some old brandy still further to mellow him, let himself go, and for a couple of hours held us entranced while he told us of celebrated trials in which he had been concerned. I was not surprised therefore that when Miss Gray asked us to lunch with her next day, Landon, even before I could answer, accepted with alacrity.

"A very nice woman," he said when she had left us. "And a head on her shoulders. She must have been very pretty as a girl. She's not bad now. Why isn't she married?"

"She always says nobody asked her."

"Stuff and nonsense! Women ought to marry. Too many of these women about who want their independence.

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I have no patience with them."

Miss Gray lived in a little house facing the sea at St. Jean, which is a couple of miles from my own house at Cap Ferrat. We drove down next day at one and were shown into her living room.

"I have a surprise for you," she said to me, as we shook hands. "The Craigs are coming."

"You've got to know them at last."

"Well, I thought it was too absurd that we should live next door to one another, and bathe from the same beach every day and not speak. So I forced myself on them, and they've promised to come to lunch today. I wanted you to meet them, to see what you make of them." She turned to Landon. "I hope you don't mind."

But he was on his best behavior.

"I'm sure I shall be delighted to meet any friends of yours, Miss Gray," he said.

"But they're not friends of mine. I've seen a lot of them, but I never spoke to them till yesterday. It'll be a treat for them to meet an author and a celebrated judge."

I had heard a good deal of the Craigs from Miss Gray during the previous three weeks. They had taken the cottage next to hers, and at first she feared they would be a nuisance. She liked her own company and did not want to be bothered with the trivialities of social intercourse. But she very quickly discovered that the Craigs were as plainly disinclined to strike up an acquaintance with her as she with them. Though in that little place they could not but meet two or three times a day, the Craigs never by so much as a glance gave an indication that they had ever seen her before. Miss Gray told me she thought it very tactful of them to make no attempt to intrude upon her privacy, but I had an idea that she was not affronted, a little puzzled rather that they apparently wanted to know her as little as she wanted to know them. I had guessed some time before that she would not be able to resist making the first advance. On one occasion, while we were walking, we passed them, and I was able to have a good look at them. Craig was a handsome man, with a red, honest face, a gray moustache and thick strong gray hair. He held himself well, and there was a bluff heartiness of manner about him that suggested a broker who had retired on a handsome fortune. His wife was a woman hard of visage, tall and of masculine appearance, with dull, fair hair, too elaborately dressed, a large nose, a large mouth and a weather-beaten skin. She was not only plain but grim. Her clothes, pretty, flimsy and graceful, sat oddly upon her, for they would better have suited a girl of eighteen, and Mrs. Craig was certainly forty. Miss Gray told me they were well cut and expensive. I thought he looked commonplace and she looked disagreeable, and I thought Miss Gray was lucky that they were so obviously disposed to keep themselves to themselves.

"There's something rather charming about them," she told me.

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"What?"

"They love one another. And they adore the baby."

For they had a child that was not more than a year old; and from this Miss Gray concluded that they had not long been married. She liked to watch them with their baby. A nurse took it out every morning in a pram, but before this, father and mother spent an ecstatic quarter of an hour teaching it to walk. They stood a few yards apart and urged the child to flounder from one to the other; and each time it tumbled into the parental arms, it was lifted up and rapturously embraced. And when finally it was tucked up in the smart pram, they hung over it with charming baby talk and watched it out of sight as though they couldn't bear to let it go.

Miss Gray used often to see them walking up and down the lawn of their garden arm in arm; they did not talk, as though they were so happy to be together that conversation was unnecessary; and it warmed her heart to observe the affection which that dour, unsympathetic woman had so obviously for her tall, handsome husband. It was a pretty sight to see Mrs. Craig brush an invisible speck of dust off his coat, and Miss Gray was convinced that she purposely made holes in his socks in order to have the pleasure of darning them. And it looked as though he loved her as much as she loved him. Every now and then he would give her a glance, and she would look up at him and smile, and he gave her cheek a little pat. Because they were no longer young, their mutual devotion was peculiarly touching.

I never knew why Miss Gray had never married; I felt as certain as the Judge that she had had plenty of chances; and I asked myself, when she talked to me about the Craigs, whether the sight of this matrimonial felicity didn't give her a slight pang. I suppose complete happiness is very rare in this world, but these two people seemed to enjoy it, and it may be that Miss Gray was so strangely interested in them only because she could not quite suppress the feeling in her heart that by remaining single she had missed something.

Because she didn't know what their first names were, she called them Edwin and Angelina. She made up a story about them. She told it to me one day; and when I ridiculed it, she was quite short with me. This, as far as I can remember, is how it went: They had fallen in love with one another years before — perhaps twenty years — when Angelina, a young girl then, had the fresh grace of her teens and Edwin was a brave youth setting out joyously on the journey of life. And since the gods, who are said to look upon young love with kindliness, nevertheless do not bother their heads with practical matters, neither Edwin nor Angelina had a penny to bless himself with. It was impossible for them to marry, but they had courage, hope and confidence. Edwin made up his mind to go out to South America or Malaya or where you like, make his fortune and return to marry the

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girl who had patiently waited for him. It couldn't take more than two or three years, five at the utmost; and what is that, when you're twenty and the whole of life is before you? Meanwhile of course Angelina would live with her widowed mother.

But things didn't pan out according to schedule. Edwin found it more difficult than he had expected to make a fortune; in fact, he found it hard to earn enough money to keep body and soul together, and only Angelina's love and her tender letters gave him the heart to continue the struggle. At the end of five years he was not much better off than when he started. Angelina would willingly have joined him and shared his poverty, but it was impossible for her to leave her mother, bedridden as she was, poor thing, and there was nothing for them to do but have patience. And so the years passed slowly, and Edwin's hair grew gray, and Angelina became grim and haggard. Hers was the harder lot, for she could do nothing but wait. The cruel glass showed such charms as she had possessed slip away from her one by one; and at last she discovered that youth, with a mocking laugh and a pirouette, had left her for good. Her sweetness turned sour from long tending of a querulous invalid; her mind was narrowed by the society of the small town in which she lived. Her friends married and had children, but she remained a prisoner to duty.

She wondered if Edwin still loved her. She wondered if he would ever come back. She often despaired. Ten years went by, and fifteen, and twenty. Then Edwin wrote to say that his affairs were settled, he had made enough money for them to live upon in comfort, and if she were still willing to marry him, he would return at once. By a merciful interposition of providence, Angelina's mother chose that very moment to abandon a world in which she had made herself a thorough nuisance. But when after so long a separation they met, Angelina saw with dismay that Edwin was as young as ever. It's true his hair was gray, but it infinitely became him. He had always been good-looking, but now he was a very handsome man in the flower of his age. She felt as old as the hills. She was conscious of her narrowness, her terrible provincialism, compared with the breadth he had acquired by his long sojourn in foreign countries. He was gay and breezy as of old, but her spirit was crushed. The bitterness of life had warped her soul. It seemed monstrous to bind that alert and active man to her by a promise twenty years old, and she offered him his release. He went deathly pale.

"Don't you care for me any more?"

And she realized on a sudden — oh, the rapture, oh, the relief! — that to him too she was just the same as she had ever been. He had thought of her always as she was; her portrait had been, as it were, stamped on his heart, so that now, when the real woman stood before him, she was, to him, still eighteen.

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So they were married.

"I don't believe a word of it," I said when Miss Gray had brought her story to its happy ending.

"I insist on your believing it," she said. "I'm convinced it's true, and I haven't the smallest doubt that they'll live happily together to a ripe old age." Then she made a remark that I thought rather shrewd. "Their love is founded on an illusion, perhaps; but since it has to them all the appearance of reality, what does it matter?"

While I have told you this idyllic story of Miss Gray's invention, the three of us, our hostess, Landon and myself, waited for the Craigs to come.

"Have you ever noticed that if people live next door to you, they're invariably late?" Miss Gray asked the Judge.

"No, I haven't," he answered acidly. "I'm always punctual myself, and I expect other people to be punctual."

"I suppose it's no good offering you a cocktail?"

"None whatever, madam."

"But I have some sherry that they tell me isn't bad."

The Judge took the bottle out of her hands and looked at the label. A faint smile broke on his thin lips.

"This is a civilized drink, Miss Gray. With your permission I will help myself. I never knew a woman yet who knew how to pour out a glass of wine. One should hold a woman by the waist, but a bottle by the neck."

While he was sipping the old sherry with every sign of satisfaction, Miss Gray glanced out of the window.

"Oh, that's why the Craigs are late. They were waiting for the baby to come back."

I followed her eyes and saw that the nurse had just pushed the pram past Miss Gray's house on her way home. Craig took the baby out of the pram and lifted it high in the air. The baby, trying to tug at his moustache, crowed gleefully. Mrs. Craig stood by watching, and the smile on her face made her harsh features almost pleasant. The window was open, and we heard her speak.

"Come along, darling," she said, "we're late."

He put the baby back in the pram, and they came up to the door of Miss Gray's house and rang the bell. The maid showed them in. They shook hands with Miss Gray, and because I was standing near, she introduced me to them. Then she turned to the Judge.

"And this is Sir Edward Landon — Mr. and Mrs. Craig."

One would have expected the Judge to move forward with an outstretched hand, but he remained stock-still. He put his eyeglass up to his eye, that eyeglass that I had on more than one occasion seen him use with devastating effect in court, and stared at the newcomers.

"Gosh, what a dirty customer," I said to myself.

He let the glass drop from his eye.

"How do you do," he said. "Am I mistaken in thinking that we've met before?"

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The question turned my eyes to the Craigs. They stood side by side close to one another, as though they had drawn together for mutual protection. They did not speak. Mrs. Craig looked terrified. Craig's red face was darkened by a purple flush, and his eyes appeared almost to start out of his head.

"I don't think so," he said in a rich, deep voice. "Of course I've heard of you, Sir Edward."

"More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows," said he.

Miss Gray meanwhile had been giving the cocktail shaker a shake, and now she handed cocktails to her two guests. She had noticed nothing. I didn't know what it all meant; in fact, I wasn't sure it meant anything. The incident, if incident there was, passed so quickly that I was half inclined to think that I had read into the strangers' momentary embarrassment on being introduced to a celebrated man something for which there was no foundation. I set about making myself pleasant. I asked them how they liked the Riviera and if they were comfortable in their house. Miss Gray joined in, and we chatted, as one does with strangers, of commonplace things. They talked easily and pleasantly. Mrs. Craig said how much they enjoyed the bathing and complained of the difficulty of getting fish at the seaside. I was aware that the Judge did not join in the conversation, but looked down at his feet as though he were unconscious of the company.

Lunch was announced. We went into the dining room. We were only five, and it was a small round table, so the conversation could not be anything but general. I must confess that it was carried on chiefly by Miss Gray and myself. The Judge was silent, but he often was, for he was a moody creature, and I paid no attention. I noticed that he ate the omelette with good appetite, and when it was passed round again took a second helping. The Craigs struck me as a little shy, but that didn't surprise me, and as the second course was produced they began to talk more freely. It didn't strike me that they were very amusing people; they didn't seem interested in very much besides their baby, the vagaries of the two Italian maids they had, and an occasional flutter at Monte Carlo; and I couldn't help thinking that Miss Gray had erred in making their acquaintance. Then suddenly something happened: Craig rose abruptly from his chair and fell headlong to the floor. We jumped up. Mrs. Craig threw herself down, over her husband, and took his head in her hands.

"It's all right, George," she cried in an agonized tone. "It's all right!"

"Put his head down," I said. "He's only fainted."

I felt his pulse and could feel nothing. I said he had fainted, but I wasn't sure it wasn't a stroke. He was the sort of heavy, plethoric man who might easily have one. Miss Gray dipped her napkin into water and dabbed his forehead. Mrs. Craig

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seemed distraught. Then I noticed that Landon had remained quietly sitting in his chair.

"If he's fainted, you're not helping him to recover by crowding round him," he said acidly.

Mrs. Craig turned her head and gave him a look of bitter hatred.

"I'll ring up the doctor," said Miss Gray.

"No, I don't think that's necessary," I said. "He's coming to."

I could feel his pulse growing stronger, and in a minute or two he opened his eyes. He gasped when he realized what had happened, and tried to struggle to his feet.

"Don't move," I said. "Lie still a little longer."

I got him to drink a glass of brandy, and the color came back to his face.

"I feel all right now," he said.

"We'll get you into the next room, and you can lie on the sofa for a bit."

"No, I'd sooner go home. It's only a step."

He got up from the floor.

"Yes, let's go back," said Mrs. Craig. She turned to Miss Gray. "I'm so sorry; he's never done anything like this before."

They were determined to go, and I thought myself it was the best thing for them to do.

"Put him to bed and keep him there, and he'll be as right as rain tomorrow."

Mrs. Craig took one of his arms and I took the other; Miss Gray opened the door, and though still a bit shaky, he was able to walk. When we arrived at the Craigs' home, I offered to go in and help to undress him; but they would neither of them hear of it. I went back to Miss Gray's and found them at dessert.

"I wonder why he fainted," Miss Gray was saying. "All the windows are open, and it's not particularly hot today."

"I wonder," said the Judge.

I noticed that his thin pale face bore an expression of some complacency. We had our coffee; and then, since the Judge and I were going to play golf, we got into the car and drove up the hill to my house.

"How did Miss Gray get to know those people?" Landon asked me. "They struck me as rather second-rate. I shouldn't have thought they were very much her mark."

"You know women. She likes her privacy, and when they settled in next door, she was quite decided that she wouldn't have anything to do with them; but when she discovered that they didn't want to have anything to do with her, she couldn't rest till she'd made their acquaintance."

I told him the story she had invented about her neighbors. He listened with an expressionless face.

"I'm afraid your friend Miss Gray is a sentimental donkey, my dear fellow," he said when I had come to an end. "I tell you, women ought to marry. She'd soon have had all that nonsense knocked out of her if she'd had a half a dozen brats."

"What do you know about the Craigs?" I asked.

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He gave me a frigid glance.

"I? Why should I know anything about them? I thought they were very ordinary people."

I wish I knew how to describe the strong impression he gave me, both by the glacial austerity of his look and by the rasping finality of his tone, that he was not prepared to say anything more. We finished the drive in silence.

Landon was well on in his sixties, and he was the kind of golfer who never hits a long ball but is never off the straight, and he was a deadly putter, so, though he gave me strokes, he beat me handsomely. After dinner I took him in to Monte Carlo, where he finished the evening by winning a couple of thousand francs at the roulette table. These successive events put him into a remarkably good humor.

"A very pleasant day," he said when we parted for the night. "I've thoroughly enjoyed it."

I spent the next morning at work, and we did not meet till lunch. We were just finishing when I was called to the telephone.

When I came back, my guest was drinking a second cup of coffee.

"That was Miss Gray," I said.

"Oh? What had she to say?"

"The Craigs have done a bolt. They disappeared last night. The maids live in the village; and when they came this morning, they found the house empty. They'd skipped — the Craigs, the nurse and the baby — and taken their luggage with them. They left money on the table for the maids' wages, the rent to the end of their tenancy and the tradesmen's bills."

The Judge said nothing. He took a cigar from the box, examined it carefully and then lit it with deliberation.

"What have you got to say about that?" I asked.

"My dear fellow, are you obliged to use these American phrases? Isn't English good enough for you?"

"Is that an American phrase? It expresses exactly what I mean. You can't imagine I'm such a fool as not to have noticed that you and the Craigs had met before; and if they've vanished into thin air like figments of the imagination, it's a fairly reasonable conclusion that the circumstances under which you met were not altogether pleasant."

The Judge gave a little chuckle, and there was a twinkle in his cold blue eyes.

"That was a very good brandy you gave me last night," he said. "It's against my principles to drink liqueurs after lunch, but it's a very dull man who allows his principles to enslave him, and for once I think I should enjoy one."

I sent for the brandy and watched the Judge while he poured himself out a generous measure. He took a sip with obvious satisfaction.

"Do you remember the Wingford murder?" he asked me.

"No."

"Perhaps you weren't in England at the time. Pity — you might have

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come to the trial. You'd have enjoyed it. It caused a lot of excitement; the papers were full of it.

"Miss Wingford was a rich spinster of mature age who lived in the country with a companion. She was a healthy woman for her age; and when she died rather suddenly, her friends were surprised. Her physician, a fellow called Brandon, signed the certificate and she was duly buried. The will was read, and it appeared that she had left everything she had, something between sixty and seventy thousand pounds, to her companion. The relatives were very sore, but there was nothing they could do about it. The will had been drawn up by her lawyer and witnessed by his clerk and Dr. Brandon.

"But Miss Wingford had a maid who had been with her for thirty years and had always understood that she would be remembered in the will; she claimed that Miss Wingford had promised to leave her well provided for, and when she found that she wasn't even mentioned, she flew into a passion. She told the nephew and the two nieces who had come down for the funeral that she was sure Miss Wingford had been poisoned, and she said that if they didn't go to the police, she'd go herself. Well, they didn't do that, but they went to see Dr. Brandon. He laughed. He said that Miss Wingford had had a weak heart and he'd been treating her for years. She died just as he had always expected her to die, peacefully in her sleep; and he advised them not to pay any attention to what the maid said. She had always hated the companion, a Miss Starling, and been jealous of her. Dr. Brandon was highly respected; he had been Miss Wingford's doctor for a long time, and the two nieces, who'd stayed with her often, knew him well. He was not profiting by the will, and there seemed no reason to doubt his word, so the family thought there was nothing to do but make the best of a bad job and went back to London.

"But the maid went on talking; she talked so much that at last the police, much against their will, I must admit, were obliged to take notice, and an order to exhume the body was made. There was an inquest, and it was found that Miss Wingford had died from an overdose of veronal. The coroner's jury found that it had been administered by Miss Starling, and she was arrested. A detective was sent down from Scotland Yard, and he got together some unexpected evidence. It appeared that there'd been a good deal of gossip about Miss Starling and Dr. Brandon. They'd been seen a lot together in places in which there was no reason for them to be except that they wanted to be together, and the general impression in the village was that they were only waiting for Miss Wingford to die to get married. That put a very different complexion on the case. To make a long story short, the police got enough evidence in their opinion to justify them in arresting the doctor and charging him and Miss Starling with murder."

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The Judge took another sip of brandy.

"The case came up for trial before me. The case for the prosecution was that the accused were madly in love with one another and had done the poor old lady to death so that they could marry on the fortune Miss Starling had wheedled her employer into leaving her. Miss Wingford always had a cup of cocoa when she went to bed, which Miss Starling prepared for her; and the counsel for the prosecution claimed that it was in this that Miss Starling had dissolved the tablets that caused Miss Wingford's death. The accused elected to give evidence on their own behalf, and they made a miserable showing in the witness box. They lied their heads off. Though witnesses testified they had seen them walking together at night with their arms round one another's waists, though Brandon's maid testified she had seen them kissing one another in the doctor's house, they swore they were no more than friends. And oddly enough, medical evidence proved that Miss Starling was *virgo intacta*.

"Brandon admitted that he had given Miss Wingford a bottle of veronal tablets because she complained of sleeplessness, but declared he had warned her never to take more than one, and then only when absolutely necessary. The defense sought to prove that she had taken the tablets either by accident or because she wanted to commit suicide. That didn't hold water for a moment. Miss Wingford was a jolly, normal old lady who thoroughly enjoyed life; and her death occurred two days before the expected arrival of an old friend for a week's visit. She hadn't complained to the maid of sleeping badly — in fact, her maid had always thought her a very good sleeper. It was impossible to believe that she had accidentally taken a sufficient number of tablets to kill herself. Personally, I had no doubt that it was a put-up job between the doctor and the companion. The motive was obvious and sufficient. I summed up and I hope summed up fairly; but it was my duty to put the facts before the jury, and to my mind the facts were damning. The jury filed out. I don't suppose you know that when you are sitting on the bench, you somehow get the feeling of the court. You have to be on your guard against it, to be sure it doesn't influence you. I never had it more strongly than on that day that there wasn't a soul in court who wasn't convinced that those two people had committed the crime with which they were charged. I hadn't the shadow of a doubt that the jury would bring in a verdict of guilty. Juries are incalculable. They were out for three hours, and when they came back I knew at once that I was mistaken. In a murder case when a jury is going to bring in a verdict of guilty they won't look at the prisoner; they look away. I noticed that three or four of the jurymen glanced at the two prisoners in the dock. They brought in a verdict of not guilty. The real names of Mr.

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and Mrs. Craig are Dr. and Mrs. Brandon.

"I'm just as certain as I am that I'm sitting here that they committed between them a cruel and heartless murder and richly deserved to be hanged."

"What do you think made the jury find them not guilty?"

"I've asked myself that; and do you know the only explanation I can give? The fact that it was conclusively proved that they had never been lovers. And if you come to think of it, that's one of the most curious features of the whole case. That woman was prepared to commit murder to get the man she loved, but she wasn't prepared to have an illicit love affair with him."

"Human nature is very odd, isn't it?"

"Very," said Landon, helping himself to another glass of brandy.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . the master's hand has lost none of its craft . . ." (DBH)	". . . it looks to me like a transition piece which might take its author away from the thriller altogether . . ." (JS)	
"The astounding Agatha at peak form." (DBH)	". . . jaunty thriller . . . an amusing garrulity with an intentional disrespect for probability." (JS)	*KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES*
". . . ballet of human folly . . . Witty and compassionate." (KS)	"A tale *manqué* largely because . . . a tale of detection rather than a story of a crime." (JS)	AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*
"Always top-rank . . . Wish the bright boys would study Coxe." (DBH)	"Well-paced action . . . cliché of . . . situation. Skilled but contrived." (KS)	EB: *Elizabeth Bullock in The New York Times*
". . . a fairly good novel about an interesting character . . . and a fast mystery as a bonus." (HM)	"New and realistic point of view makes double suspense . . . Absorbingly excellent." (KS)	AD: *August Derleth in The Madison Capitol Times*
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". . . few writers have so consistently bettered their work . . . without question one of the year's best mysteries." (AD)	". . . should do much to explain . . . why Queen sells in the millions . . . one of the best of all the twenty-five Queens." (AB)	LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*
		JS: *James Sandoe*
		KS: *Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature*
		HT: *Unsigned review in The New York Herald Tribune*

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FOR AULD LANG SYNE

When we think of the Cleek stories by Thomas W. Hanshew, we somehow visualize a large number of volumes — enough to fill out a whole corner of a library. Strangely enough, there are comparatively few books about The Vanishing Cracksman and the true Prince of Mauravania: less than a dozen novels and a mere four volumes of short stories. Here, for the record, are the short stories in book form:

THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES.
London: Cassell, 1910. Published in the U. S. as CLEEK, THE MASTER DETECTIVE; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, 1918. The English first edition was reissued as CLEEK THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES; London: Cassell, 1913; in this edition, three of the original stories have been omitted, and one new story added; this reissue, in the same altered text, was published in the U. S. by Cassell of New York in 1913 — five years ahead of CLEEK, THE MASTER DETECTIVE.

CLEEK OF SCOTLAND YARD.
London: Cassell, 1914; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, 1914.

CLEEK'S GREATEST RIDDLES.
London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1916. Published in the U. S. as CLEEK'S GOVERNMENT CASES; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, 1917.

THE RIDDLE OF THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT (*in collaboration with Mary E. Hanshew*).
Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, 1921. No record of an English edition. This book contains the title story, which is a novelette, and six short stories.

And that is all there is of the Cleek saga — in books of short stories. But it is not commonly known that Hanshew wrote three other series of Cleek shorts, and gave them names which may have been intended as the eventual book titles, if the series were ever collected and issued as bound volumes. Why the three series were not published as books is a mystery which will probably never be solved. In their day, the Cleek stories were tremendously popular. Most of them appeared in "Short Stories" magazine, where they were advertised as "the most consistent and most convincing detective stories since Sherlock Holmes." Indeed, the tales of Cleek were so

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popular that the Edison Company produced them as motion pictures — at the phenomenal rate of one picture per month! (And do you recall the famous "silent" star who played the role of Cleek? — Thomas Meighan!)

Here, then, for the record, is a list of the three "lost" series of Cleek stories: in 1913 and 1914, there appeared "The Chronicles of Cleek" — at least nine stories including a tantalizing, maddening tale called "The Riddle of the Lost Hotel." In 1915 and 1916, another four stories (perhaps more) were grouped as "The Further Adventures of Cleek" — including "The Riddle of the Globes of Darkness," "The Riddle of the Scarlet Monk," and "The Riddle of the Stones of Flame."

Apparently, at this point, Hanshew wearied of his forty-faced sleuth: for more than three years Cleek and his creator remained in mysterious retirement (in the short-story form). Then, late in 1919 and early in 1920, six more shorts broke into print as the "Further Exploits of Hamilton Cleek" — including "The Riddle of the Purple Blinds," "The Riddle of the Painted Shrine," and "The Riddle of the Amber Chow."

So far as we have been able to check, this was the final series of Cleek adventures. Again they appeared in "Short Stories," which reminded their readers that Cleek had long been a favorite with them, and described the new series as possessing "all the old cleverness, ingenuity, and charm."

We now bring you the best of the Last Exploits of the Man of the Forty Faces — Cleek at his cleverest, at his most ingenious, and at his most charming. The story has been somewhat abridged — remember, it is more than thirty years since the tale was first published!

THE RIDDLE OF THE SILVER DEATH

by THOMAS W. HANSHEW

For a case which involved so many queer issues, and presented such difficulties, it must be frankly admitted the opening was one singularly devoid of romance.

It came about in this wise: The lure of the sea having called away Mrs. Narkom and family to Bournemouth, the Superintendent after having completed his morning's toil at Scotland Yard, gladly accepted Cleek's invitation to have an early lunch at a famous restaurant, and proceed later to a music hall.

And upon such small events do big issues hang that had it not been

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for Mr. Narkom having rung up that same restaurant to reserve a table, the case of the Constantine Bonds would never have come under his notice. As it was, however, the two of them having enjoyed a good meal at the Milan, the Superintendent rose to summon the waiter. Thus brought prominently into public view, his portly figure attracted the notice of two gentlemen, seated at a distant table. This almost immediately resulted in the younger of them, after a hurried discussion with his companion, rising to his feet with an evident bad grace, and glancing toward Mr. Narkom and his companion with some significance.

The little interlude had not passed unnoticed by the Superintendent, who, having attracted the waiter's attention, resumed his seat, and said quickly, to Cleek:

"Something is up, I fancy. Parkett, of Parkett, Downes and Quick, Solicitors of Lincoln's Inn (big Chancery Lane people) is sitting over there with his partner, Quick. Hello, he's coming along to us! Looks a bit white about the gills, too. Wonder what's the matter?"

Before Cleek could answer, the gentleman in question reached their table, and placing a shaking hand upon Mr. Narkom's chair, broke out quickly:

"The very man I was after! I left the police phoning for you, Mr. Narkom. This is a godsend indeed! A terrible thing has happened, my dear sir, and my partner — Lambert Quick, you know — declares we are ruined and disgraced forever. He is even beginning to talk of suicide."

Mr. Narkom cleared his throat, and motioned the agitated man to a seat beside them at their table.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Parkett?" he asked quietly. "What do you stand to lose?"

"Heaven only knows!" ejaculated that gentleman with a sigh. "There's murder as well as robbery, Mr. Narkom, and ——"

"Murder?" echoed the Superintendent in a low voice.

"Yes, murder and robbery. Bonds to the value of some £30,000 entrusted to us for safety, are gone — zip! Like that! Right from under our very noses."

Mr. Narkom's rosy countenance was very grave. "This is a serious matter indeed, Mr. Parkett. Who has been murdered in connection with the matter?"

Mr. Parkett jumped nervously. "Why, it's my senior partner, Mr. Narkom — Mr. Downes himself!"

"Good lord! When did it take place?"

"This morning between 9 and 9:30," returned Mr. Parkett, and Mr. Narkom drew out his watch and glanced at it.

"It's now past two," he said, "and you say you're only just phoning the police? Given the murderer a good five hours' start, and time to cash the bonds as well. Why this delay, Mr. Parkett?"

"I wanted to phone the Yard at

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once," replied Mr. Parkett with some hesitation, "but Quick, my partner, was against it. Thought he'd got a clue himself; and if I may speak out plainly, I wanted to get that chap Cleek on the job. S'pose you couldn't get on to him, could you, Mr. Narkom?"

But it was Cleek himself who answered.

"Afraid not," he said blandly. "No chance there. He's out on a Government job."

Mr. Parkett twitched up an inquiring eyebrow, and stared coldly at the rather commonplace looking individual who had thus addressed him.

"Mr. George Headland, one of our smartest men," Mr. Narkom said, waving his hand in Cleek's direction. "Just the chap for this case too, my dear Mr. Parkett. Leave yourself entirely in his hands."

"Oh — I see. Well, pleased to meet you, Mr. Headland. Though if I may speak plainly you don't look much like a detective, you know. But of course you never can tell."

"No — you never can," responded Cleek with a little smile, "and now, seeing that I am to take this case in hand, I want to ask one or two questions. Firstly, if your partner, Mr. Quick, didn't at first want to call in police aid, what made him change his mind?"

"That's just it — he hasn't!" replied Parkett with a shrug of the shoulders: "As a matter of fact, he was dead against it from the start. He's frightened of its getting to the ears of the Mauravanian Consul to whom the bonds belong. If it were only robbery it would be bad enough to hush it up, but murder's another matter; and considering that Mr. Downes and I were not on the best of terms, well, you know what that means in a case of this kind. I assuredly want to have no silence about it. I told Quick an hour ago that I was going to ring up Mr. Narkom, and induced him to come along in the meantime and have a bite of lunch. If I go and settle the bill, will you both come back and look into things for me?"

"Certainly." It was Cleek who spoke. "We'll be along directly."

"Any ideas, old chap?" asked the Superintendent, after the lawyer had left. "I guessed you must have, seeing you sent Parkett away."

"Yes — for a very good reason. I happen to have met the Mauravanian Consul, M. Constantine, and I prefer to hide my light under a bushel until I find out whether his consulship isn't at the bottom of the pack, so to speak. He's a wily old scoundrel; one of those smooth-tongued, suave rascals who have made thieving a fine art. What's that? Not likely to steal his own bonds, eh? No, certainly not, if they are his own personal property; and in that case you may stake your life that he wouldn't have let them out of his possession. But if they belong to his Government, which I suspect to be the case, it may be a 'plant' to get them stolen ostensibly, and the solicitors blamed."

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Five minutes later, in company with Mr. Parkett, and young Lambert Quick — a young man who seemed about as broken in nerve as it is possible to be, and whom Cleek silently designated as "more a fool than a rogue" — they summoned a taxi, which made its way toward Lincoln Inn. There, in the firm's offices and looking out upon a quiet green, tree-shaded square, the tale of the mystery was told in its entirety.

According to Mr. Parkett, who seemed to be the spokesman and leader of the firm, the three partners had assembled unusually early that morning to meet M. Constantine. They were to take over from him Mauravanian bonds representing some of the biggest financial concerns of his country. These were to be held in trust for the Government until M. Constantine himself should return from a diplomatic journey and look after them.

"But why did M. Constantine bring these valuable bonds here?" put in Cleek quietly. "Would it not have been safer to have kept them under seal at the Consulate itself?"

"The very thing I said myself," returned Mr. Parkett, "and the very subject which poor Downes and I had words over. Directly I learned when I got back from court yesterday that he had arranged with the Consul to take over these bonds on the following morning, I remonstrated with him. But all to no purpose. You see we have a very old-fashioned safe — suitable for keeping our own valuables in — but I was naturally very nervous at the thought of harboring such valuable papers here."

"Any idea why Downes consented to the plan at all?" asked Cleek quietly. A swift, embarrassed look fleeted over Lambert Quick's face, and Cleek glanced at him suddenly, but his eyes had fallen.

"Well, Mr. Headland," he interposed, before Parkett could speak, "that, I must admit, was partly my fault. I am known to M. Constantine socially, and it happens that I — well, I have been a friend of Madame Constantine's. So it came about naturally, you see."

The queer, little one-sided smile traveled for a moment up Cleek's face, and was gone again in a twinkling. So it was like that, eh? This man Quick fancied himself as a breaker of hearts, and had evidently entangled his own heart this time in the meshes of the wily Consul's wife. And naturally the Consul — and possibly the lady herself — would use him as a tool in their scheme to get the bonds into the care of a firm so much above suspicion. Cleek smiled again, and Quick seeing the smile went on nervously.

"I was in Mauravania last year and had the felicity to render Madame a trifling service, and ever since we have been — the very best of friends," he said in a shaken voice. "She asked me to use my influence with Mr. Downes to take charge of the bonds while they were away. So I did my best."

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"Any idea why Madame herself wanted them out of the Consulate?" asked Cleek.

"Well, she is a very highly-strung woman, and has taken a queer distaste to M. Stepan, her husband's secretary. She felt perfectly sure that something would happen if, while her husband was away, the bonds were left in his care. And as her husband's honor is at stake — well, one can quite understand her feelings. My honor also seems to hang in the balance, Mr. Headland, and — and it's a bit upsetting, to say the least."

"Of course. And that is the reason why you did not want to call in the police, I take it, Mr. Quick? You thought you would find the thief in M. Stepan, eh?"

Quick nodded, and flushed crimson.

"Yes. But I was wrong, for I rang up the Consulate and found that he had accompanied M. Constantine at the last minute — so that of course exonerated him from any possible guilt."

"I see." Cleek turned to Parkett who had sat silent during the interlude. "And now, Mr. Parkett, what happened this morning after M. Constantine appeared?"

"He brought in the bonds, showed us his authority to lodge them with us, and saw them put into the safe himself. Then we cracked a bottle of champagne to celebrate the deal."

Cleek's eyebrows went up.

"Oho!" he said in two different tones. "A bit early in the morning for champagne."

"Yes," replied Mr. Parkett with a slight laugh. "But M. Constantine had been at a reception until 5 A. M. and as Downes always has a case of Pommery on tap, we broached a bottle and all four of us drank to his safe return. Then Quick and I went down to see him off into his car, and about five minutes later returned. To our horror we found poor Downes seated at his desk just as we had left him, but as dead as a door-nail! It was horrible! Then we thought of the bonds."

"Yes," interposed Cleek softly. "But did you both think of them at the same time?"

"Er — that is — I — I think *I* thought of them, Mr. Headland," threw in Quick, moistening his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. "I wondered if they were all right, and so I looked, but the safe was as bare of 'em as your hand."

"And that's the case in a nutshell," ended Mr. Parkett.

"Looks like a pretty tough nutshell to crack," returned Cleek pinching up his chin. He glanced suddenly at Mr. Lambert Quick's pale, nervous face and, it seemed to him, that for a moment the man breathed easier.

Switching round in his seat, Cleek glanced about him inquiringly.

"Is this the room in which the tragedy took place?" he said.

"Heavens, no!" It was Parkett who spoke. "This is Quick's room. It happened in Downes's room, and the body is still there, with a screen put round it."

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"Hmm, I see. But if I understood you rightly, you were absent from the room for five minutes — both of you. Could not someone have entered from the outer room and gone on into Mr. Downes's office?"

"Not without being seen," returned Mr. Parkett, with a shake of the head. "As you can see, this room has been partitioned off by glass and wood walls and is in full view of the clerks outside."

"And more than that," put in Quick. "It was still locked on the outside, as I had left it upon the preceding night. I didn't stop to open it this morning, as we all came in to the other room direct."

"No other means of exit evidently," commented Cleek. "Well, let's get down to bed-rock, and see if the dead man can tell us anything."

A spasm of fear passed across Quick's face, and he wiped his brow hurriedly with his handkerchief. They rose to their feet, Parkett leading the way into the senior partner's room. It was a large, comfortably furnished apartment, and spelled law in every detail, from the stack of dusty deed-boxes which lay upon the shelves of a big bookcase, to the large, old-fashioned safe that occupied nearly one whole side of the room. The only unusual features of the room — unusual for an office — were the abundance of seascape paintings which dotted its walls, a big mahogany case which was presumably a wall-desk, and a life-size suit of armor on a marble pedestal. Cleek's eyes took in every detail of the place in one keen, all-surveying look, and Parkett watching him interpreted that look aright.

"Had one weakness, attending auction sales, poor old chap!" he said quietly. "Always picking up some sort of rubbish and sending it along here. His house is just the same — packed from ceiling to door with enough stuff to stock a museum."

"Every man must have his hobby," interposed Cleek quietly. "Can't bear other people's belongings myself, but then I'm no connoisseur. Wonder what his wife thought about it?"

"He hasn't one. At least she disappeared ten years ago and no one knows what became of her," replied Parkett gravely. "He has no children, either. Entirely alone in the world, as far as I could make out."

"Hmm. And what becomes of his estate then?"

"Reverts to the firm," put in Quick rapidly. "He made a will only a few weeks back so as to avoid litigation or his wife's benefiting. But poor fellow, he little knew how soon we were to benefit!"

Cleek walked toward the screen which concealed the leather couch upon which David Downes lay in all the grim majesty of death. He bent down and examined the body with skillful fingers, and then leaning over it sniffed the lips two or three times.

"Looks like a case of poison," he said, as he straightened himself and turned to the silent group behind him. "No possibility of suicide, I suppose?"

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"I can hardly conceive that as possible," said Mr. Parkett. "I have known Downes for many years. He was a deeply religious man and although we did not always hit it off or see eye to eye in everything, still I knew him well enough to feel sure that he would never have committed what he had always declared to be a criminal, soul-damning action. Also, there was no reason. He had no money difficulties; as senior partner he drew half the profits and the remaining half was divided between Quick and myself. So of the three of us he was by far the best off."

"No secret enemy?"

"Best liked fellow that ever lived. Would help everyone, though latterly he was a confirmed woman-hater naturally, and without a relative in the world."

"What about that champagne. Poisoned?"

Mr. Parkett fairly snorted his indignation.

"Poisoned?" he echoed. "Well, if you can tell me how poison could hurt one man and not the three others who also drank it at the same time, then you're cleverer than I am! Of course it wasn't poisoned! Why, we opened a fresh bottle of the finest Dry Royal on the market. You can taste the rest of it for yourself if you like." He pointed to a half-empty bottle on the desk nearby. "And as for the glasses, well, I don't mind telling you we're not great drinkers, and we had to get Miss Gregory the typist to get them from the housekeeper, and she polished them here while we waited. And there they are."

His hand indicated the four empty wine glasses, dry, and apparently as clean as when they had been lifted to the lips of the drinkers. Sediment in them there was none, and Cleek shook his head dejectedly as he sniffed at them, and then at the champagne bottle, in the neck of which had been inserted a silver syphon top in order to save the remainder.

"Ah, you're of a saving turn of mind, gentlemen!" Cleek said.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Parkett. "Oh, the syphon top. Yes, we put that in first. It was Quick's idea, and a jolly good one. We ourselves, as I said before, didn't want champagne at that hour, but as I expected another client later in the day — he had an appointment with poor old Downes himself — and this man O'Brien's a bit of a drinker, we thought the remainder would have come in handy. 'Bottled sunshine,' as M. Constantine called it."

"And a good name, too," responded Cleek, as he lifted the bottle up and sniffed at it. "But this syphon top — where'd you get it from, Mr. Quick?"

"Madame Constantine," returned that gentleman. "She always uses them at the Consulate. As a matter of fact, she gave me that one, when she saw I was interested in them."

Cleek appeared not to be listening. He was sniffing at the glasses, taking up each one in turn, and twisting it about in his fingers. Then he lifted his head suddenly.

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"Bit close in here," he said after a pause, looking up at the dusty windows, still fastened tightly in spite of the sunshine. "And if it wasn't that there's no fireplace, I should say there was a strong smell of soot."

"Oh, there is a fireplace right enough, only it's blocked up by the safe," said Mr. Parkett. "We have radiators for heating in the winter, and ——"

"That accounts for it. Thought my nose couldn't have deceived me. Evidently a fall of soot behind there. I know a good man to clean it if you'd like the address of one, it's — it's — dash it all! I've forgotten, but I daresay I'll remember it later. Well, I'll have a look round in the outer office before I go." He crossed the room to the door, and turned upon the threshold. "Gad," said he, passing a hand over his forehead, "my head's positively woolly today! What about the safe? Who opened it, or was it open, when you returned?"

Mr. Parkett looked at Quick.

" 'Pon my soul, I don't remember. I entered the room first, but when I saw poor old Downes I never thought of anything else. It was Quick who thought of the bonds, not I."

"I see. Any other papers missing, by the way?"

"Not that I'm aware of," returned Parkett shaking his head.

Cleek looked at Quick, and that gentleman threw out his hands.

"Can't remember for the life of me whether it was shut or not," he said with a shaky laugh. "At least I *think* — I don't know, but I think it was shut. And the other paper missing can have no bearing on the case. It is the will of Mr. Downes, and ——"

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek sharply. "The will missing? Then who will come into the money, pray?"

"Mrs. Downes," responded Parkett, his face very pale, and wearing a surprised look at Quick's statement.

Cleek shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, there's no use crying over spilled soot," he said calmly, his eye roving the room until it rested upon the mahogany case. "Hello! That's a nice piece of furniture. What is it?"

"That? Oh, that's Downes's little washstand," explained Mr. Parkett. "He picked it up cheap at a sale, and thought a lot of it. Saved his going upstairs to wash his hands."

He crossed over to the case and opened it, pulling the front down so that a basin rested on it, and Cleek's little one-sided smile traveled swiftly up his face.

"Used it himself, did he? This morning?" he asked casually.

"No, I did," put in Quick. "Just before I came out with Parkett." Unimportant as these words were, Mr. Narkom, who up to the present had been all eyes and ears but at Cleek's request had taken no part in the proceedings, noted the sudden look of mingled relief and enlightenment that passed across his ally's face, as he passed to the outer office, followed by the two partners, and the Superintendent himself.

It was considerably after three

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o'clock, and the office was filled by the staff, all apparently trying to work as though nothing had happened — a task somewhat difficult under the circumstances, and many eyes were upon the door of the fatal room.

"Staff complete?" said Cleek in an undertone to Parkett.

"Yes," answered that gentleman, after a swift look round. "But none of them came in until after we ourselves did, even if it were possible to suspect them of such a thing."

"Who opens up, then?" asked Cleek, suddenly developing a fit of violent sneezing and sniffing as though he had been seized with a bad attack of hay fever. "Whew! It's that beastly soot! Always upsets me. A glass of water perhaps or ——"

"Better come along to the housekeeper," suggested Parkett in mild alarm, as they made the tour of the room and stood once more upon the threshold of the inner office. But by then Cleek's nose had regained its normality.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "there's nothing more to be gained here, so I'll lock this room of Mr. Downes's up till I've made my report. It can be opened again last thing before you go." Suiting the action to the word, he coolly locked the door, and then as the astonished partners stood outside staring at him, said, "It's the soot. Won't be able to find a single clue till I've cleaned your chimney. Now I'd like to see the housekeeper, gentlemen. Don't bother, I'll find her for myself. But I'd rather you waited for me."

So saying, he nodded to Mr. Narkom, and bounded up the wooden stairs, with a backthrown comment that he "wouldn't be a jiffy."

Now a "jiffy" may be a proverbial term for a very short period of time, but certainly Cleek's jiffy did not live up to its reputation; for it was considerably later — in fact, in the neighborhood of five o'clock — when he once more put in an appearance. Even Mr. Narkom, that most patient and long-suffering of mortals, felt inclined to resent his ally's delay, while the irritation of the two partners was apparent upon their faces. They were all waiting in the small office which had been designated as Mr. Quick's, and from which the door led into the larger office of the dead partner.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, gentlemen," said Cleek casually, "but there were quite a lot of things to do. You see, I did a lot more than go upstairs when I left you. First of all, I've seen your Dr. Roberts, whom you called in this morning, and he tells me that it is possibly hyoscene poison."

"Hanged if I can see what difference that makes," threw in Mr. Parkett irritably.

"Ah, well, come in and see," returned Cleek, opening the door of the other office and leading the way in. "Thinking always makes me a bit thirsty," he continued, crossing over to the desk where the champagne bottle stood and picking it up. "Any

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objection to my tasting this champagne?"

"Not in the least," returned Mr. Parkett. "I'll open a fresh bottle."

"Not the slightest need. I only want a fresh glass, and I asked the housekeeper to bring one down. Don't happen to remember who had the first glass this morning?"

"As it happens I do," said Mr. Parkett. "I naturally poured out the first one for M. Constantine as our guest, but he insisted on poor Downes having it, as senior partner. They had quite a friendly little wrangle over it. Hello! Nothing to smile at in that, is there?"

"It's not that kind of smile, Mr. Parkett," returned Cleek. "Only when you've reckoned on two and two making four, you're always glad to get a little additional proof. Ah, here is Mrs. Smith."

He switched round upon his heel as the door opened, and a kindly-faced, gray-haired woman came in.

"Either of you gentlemen join me?" said Cleek, taking a glass and then placing his finger upon the syphon.

"Well, I've no objection," put in Mr. Parkett. "What do you say, Quick?"

"Don't mind if I do," returned that young man, and at this a little sigh of relief burst from Cleek's lips.

"Good! Good!" he ejaculated. "Right as a trivet, thank fortune! Never mind gentlemen, I think I'll take your kind suggestion and we'll crack a new bottle presently. But Mrs. Smith tells me that the best way to clean a chimney is to make a noise, so I'm going to adopt her recipe, and try a little revolver shooting. Any object will do for a target." He looked round the room, oblivious of the amazed faces that watched him. "Ah, that suit of armor is a perfect target."

He pointed toward the suit of armor upon its marble stand, cocked his revolver, raised his hand and took aim. And then — those watching saw a strange thing take place. They saw the inanimate figure of the armored knight move and totter, with a noise of creaking, rusty hinges as stiff joints bent and moved. They saw Cleek suddenly throw down his revolver and bound across the room, hurling himself upon something at the back of the figure. They heard his sudden laugh of triumph, the scramble of falling bodies, and then Cleek's clear, full tones.

"Got you, my beauty!" he exclaimed. "Thought you'd escape in the morning, eh?"

The watchers saw Cleek step forward with a slim, boyish figure in front of him, the white hands manacled, and one ragged jacket sleeve turned back to show a smooth pale arm.

"I say, Mrs. Smith," said Cleek, with a queer little smile, "is this the new paper-boy who delivered your papers in here by mistake?"

"Indeed it is, sir," said Mrs. Smith shrilly, her hands upthrown in shocked amazement.

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Mr. Parkett stepped forward and caught Cleek by the arm.

"Come, man," he said sharply. "You're not trying to convince us that this boy committed the murder of poor old Downes, are you? It's — it's incredible! Why, he's only a kid!"

"Old enough for many things, aren't you?" returned Cleek, leaning toward the boy, and giving a gentle tug at his hair. Then there was a cry from every throat as a smooth, plastered-down thatch of golden hair was revealed.

Quick's pale face went even whiter. He stepped forward.

"Helena — Madame Constantine!" he muttered in a shaky, terrified voice. "What — why?"

"All in good time, my friend," returned Cleek smoothly. "Only Madame Constantine is someone else as well. Let me introduce you to this lady of many aliases — by her *real* name. Allow me — Mrs. Downes. Am I not right, Mr. Parkett?"

"Yes, yes — Mrs. Downes, it is!" said Parkett in a high-pitched voice.

Cleek stamped twice upon the floor, and of a sudden the door flashed open and flashed shut again, and the stalwart figures of Petrie and Hammond stood before him.

Cleek waved a hand toward the woman.

"Here, boys, take your prisoner, and be careful you don't lose her."

Followed a dazed silence, which Cleek finally broke.

"Well," said he, "I suppose you all want to hear about it, don't you? I must confess that I was not quite sure whether you were dupe or accomplice, Mr. Quick, but when you did not object to drinking from that syphoned bottle, I knew you were innocent of the way you had brought death to your partner." A cry of horror burst from Quick's pale lips. "Yes, the pellet of hyoscene was in the mouth of the syphon when she gave it to you. She and Constantine were acting together, he to get the £30,000 worth of bonds, she to kill Downes and obtain his money in her own right.

"Pardon, Mr. Narkom? How do I know that? Why otherwise would she have stolen the will from the safe — and which I now have here. I abstracted it from the 'boy's' coat pocket in the struggle. Is that why *you* suspected Madame Constantine herself, Mr. Quick?"

A little cry burst from the man's lips.

"Not of the murder, I swear," he said hysterically, "but she asked me again and again to let her see the will. She said it was merely curiosity, but when I found it gone ——! I tell you it gave me a terrible shock, Mr. Headland! Heaven knows I never dreamed of the syphon top having anything to do with it!"

Cleek grinned.

"That was certainly a clever trick," he replied. "Constantine insisted upon Downes having the first drink, you said, Mr. Parkett. He knew, of course, that the force of the discharge of gas would drive the pellet straight into

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the champagne of the first drink and dissolve it, leaving the remainder of the wine perfectly harmless. All he had to do was to get you both out of the room, and leave Madame to do her share."

"But where — where was she?" asked Quick. "I'll swear she was not in this room, or inside that suit of armor, for I moved it back myself in the shadow of the safe."

"And probably gave her the idea, after she had hidden the bonds."

"And what about *them*, by the way, Cleek?" put in Mr. Narkom, his round face wreathed in smiles of admiration; but at the sound of the name both men uttered little exclamations of surprise.

"Not so far away after all, eh, Mr. Parkett?" said Cleek smiling. "Well, I told you your chimney wanted sweeping, and I think I'll start upon the job myself." He crossed the room to the back of the safe, and with great difficulty squeezed his body behind it and into the wide, old-fashioned Georgian chimney place it hid. There was the sound of a scramble, and then he emerged, his hands very black, with a bundle of rather sooty documents tied round with pink tape, which he handed to Mr. Parkett.

"The bonds," he said with a bow. "A little soiled by the chimney but otherwise exactly as you left them."

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later when Cleek, having washed the marks of the soot away, stood in Mr. Quick's small office.

"How did I find it out?" he said. "Well, I had my suspicions of Constantine from the very beginning — I happen to have met the gentleman, you know — and it was soon obvious that someone must have been concealed in the room. Then the soot gave the whole thing away. As Mr. Quick had had to wash his hands, it was evident that the safe had been shut tight by someone with sooty fingers — someone concealed in the room, someone small. Then, as all means of exit were barred, I reckoned that the person, whoever it was, was *still* in the room, hiding.

"And when the housekeeper told me that the only person who had entered the building early was a new paper-boy, who had tried to leave them in here as if by mistake, well, I began to see light. So I went along to Mr. Downes's house and rummaged round until I discovered a photo of Mrs. Downes. It was signed 'Your loving wife,' so I knew there could be no mistake. Then I went to the Consulate, for one of the lady chatelaine there. The two faces were identical except for differences of coloring which cosmetics would account for. The stolen will added one more link in the chain of evidence. Madame Constantine was already convicted in my mind. I had only to prove her guilty in the flesh.

"The armored figure I bluffed shooting. The rest was easy. . . ."

And Cleek clicked his heels and passed out into the warm glow of the early evening.

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Edith Nesbit, who signed some of her short stories by her first married name, Mrs. E. Bland, is best remembered for her wonderful tales about well-bred English children — tales which were serialized for more than a decade in "Strand Magazine," and in which E. Nesbit (her famous by-line), combining humor and sympathy and magic, gained the loyalty of successive generations of young British children. The stories of THE BASTABLE CHILDREN *were beloved by grown-ups too — all truly great children's tales share their immortality with adults; and E. Nesbit numbered among her friends and devoted admirers such celebrities as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, Richard Le Gallienne and Laurence Housman, and in her declining years, Noel Coward. And on this side of the Atlantic her equally devoted followers included Christopher Morley, William Rose Benét, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and May Lamberton Becker.*

Edith Nesbit's literary career was not always a bed of primroses. There were times, both early and late in her life, when she was forced to extraordinary lengths to earn a living for her family and herself, when she wrote not only her imaginative tales of children, but also love stories and dialect stories and verses for Christmas cards — and grim tales of horror . . .

NO. 17

by EDITH NESBIT

I YAWNED. I could not help it. But the flat, inexorable voice went on.

"Speaking from the journalistic point of view — I may tell you, gentlemen, that I once occupied the position of advertisement editor to the *Bradford Woollen Goods Journal* — and speaking from that point of view, I hold the opinion that all the best ghost stories have been written over and over again; and if I were to leave the road and return to a literary career I should never be led away by ghosts. Realism's what's wanted nowadays, if you want to be up-to-date."

The large commercial paused for breath.

"You never can tell with the public," said the lean, elderly traveler; "it's like in the fancy business. You never know how it's going to be. Whether it's a clockwork ostrich or Sometite silk or a particular shape of shaded-glass novelty or a tobacco box got up to look like a raw chop, you never know your luck."

"That depends on who you are," said the dapper man in the corner by

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the fire. "If you've got the right push about you, you can make a thing go, whether it's a clockwork kitten or imitation meat, and with stories, I take it, it's just the same — realism or ghost stories. But the best ghost story would be the realest one."

The large commercial had got his breath.

"I don't believe in ghost stories, myself," he was saying with earnest dullness; "but there was rather a queer thing happened to a second cousin of an aunt of mine by marriage — a very sensible woman with no nonsense about her. And the soul of truth and honor. I shouldn't have believed it if she had been one of your flighty, fanciful sort."

"Don't tell us the story," said the melancholy man who traveled in hardware; "you'll make us afraid to go to bed."

The well-meant effort failed. The large commercial went on, as I had known he would; his words overflowed his mouth, as his person overflowed his chair. I turned my mind to my own affairs, coming back to the commercial room in time to hear the summing up.

"The doors were all locked, and she was quite certain she saw a tall, white figure glide past her and vanish. I wouldn't have believed it if ——" And so on *da capo*, from "if she hadn't been the second cousin" to the "soul of truth and honor."

"Very good story," said the smart little man by the fire. He was a traveler, as the rest of us were; his presence in the room told us that much. He had been rather silent during dinner, and afterwards, while the red curtains were being drawn and the red and black cloth laid between the glasses and the decanters and the mahogany, he had quietly taken the best chair in the warmest corner.

"Very good story," he said; "but it's not what I call realism. You don't tell us half enough, sir. You don't say when it happened or where, or the time of year, or what color your aunt's second cousin's hair was. Nor yet you don't tell us what it was she saw, nor what the room was like where she saw it, nor why she saw it, nor what happened afterwards. And I shouldn't like to breathe a word against anybody's aunt's by marriage cousin, first or second, but I must say I like a story about what a man's seen *himself*."

"So do I," the large commercial snorted, "when I hear it."

"But," said the rabbit-faced man, "we know nowadays, what with the advance of science and all that sort of thing, we know there aren't any such things as ghosts. They're hallucinations; that's what they are."

"Don't seem to matter what you call them," the dapper one urged. "If you see a thing that looks as real as you do yourself, a thing that makes your blood run cold and turns you sick and silly with fear — well, call it ghost, or call it hallucination, or call it Tommy Dodd; it isn't the *name* that matters."

The elderly commercial coughed

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and said, "You might call it another name. You might call it ——"

"No, you mightn't," said the little man, briskly; "not when the man it happened to had been a teetotal Bond of Joy for five years and is to this day."

"Why don't you tell us the story?" I asked.

"I might be willing," he said, "if the rest of the company were agreeable. Only I warn you it's not that sort-of-a-kind-of-a-somebody-fancied-they-saw-a-sort-of-a-kind-of-a-something-sort of a story. No, sir. Everything I'm going to tell you is plain and straightforward and as clear as a timetable — clearer than some. But I don't much like telling it, especially to people who don't believe in ghosts."

Several of us said we did believe in ghosts. The heavy man snorted and looked at his watch. And the man in the best chair began.

"Turn the gas down a bit, will you? Thanks. Did any of you know Herbert Hatteras? He was on this road a good many years. No? Well, never mind. He was a good chap, I believe, with good teeth and a black whisker. But I didn't know him myself. He was before my time. Well, this that I'm going to tell you about happened at a certain commercial hotel. I'm not going to give it a name, because that sort of thing gets about, and in every other respect it's a good house and reasonable, and we all have our living to get. It was just a good ordinary old-fashioned commercial hotel, as it might be this. And I've often used it since, though they've never put me in that room again. Perhaps they shut it up after what happened.

"Well, the beginning of it was, I came across an old schoolfellow; in Boulter's Lock one Sunday it was, I remember. Jones was his name, Ted Jones. We both had canoes. We had tea at Marlow, and we got talking about this and that and old times and old mates; and do you remember Jim, and what's become of Tom, and so on. Oh, you know. And I happened to ask after his brother, Fred by name. And Ted turned pale and almost dropped his cup, and he said, 'You don't mean to say you haven't heard?' 'No; what?' I said.

" 'It was horrible,' he said. 'They wired for me, and I saw him afterwards. Whether he'd done it himself or not, nobody knows; but they'd found him lying on the floor with his throat cut.' No cause could be assigned for the rash act, Ted told me. I asked him where it had happened, and he told me the name of this hotel — I'm not going to name it. And when I'd sympathized with him and drawn him out about old times and poor old Fred being such a good old sort and all that, I asked him what the room was like. I always like to know what the places look like where things happen.

"No, there wasn't anything specially rum about the room, only that it had a French bed with red curtains in a sort of alcove; and a large mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse,

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with a glass door; and, instead of a swing-glass, a carved, black-framed glass screwed up against the wall between the windows, and a picture of 'Belshazzar's Feast' over the mantelpiece. I beg your pardon?" He stopped, for the heavy commercial had opened his mouth and shut it again.

"I thought you were going to say something," the dapper man went on. "Well, we talked about other things and parted, and I thought no more about it till business brought me to — but I'd better not name the town either — and I found my firm had marked this very hotel — where poor Fred had met his death, you know — for me to put up at. And I had to put up there too, because of their addressing everything to me there. And, anyhow, I expect I should have gone there out of curiosity.

"No. I didn't believe in ghosts in those days. I was like you, sir." He nodded amiably to the large commercial.

"The house was very full, and we were quite a large party in the room — very pleasant company, as it might be tonight; and we got talking of ghosts — just as it might be us. And there was a chap in glasses, sitting just over there, I remember — an old hand on the road, he was — and he said, just as it might be any of you, 'I don't believe in ghosts, but I wouldn't care to sleep in Number Seventeen, for all that'; and, of course, we asked him why. 'Because,' said he, very short, 'that's why.'

"But when we'd persuaded him a bit, he told us.

" 'Because that's the room where chaps cut their throats,' he said. 'There was a chap called Bert Hatteras began it. They found him weltering in his gore. And since then every man that's slept there's been found with his throat cut.'

"I asked him how many had slept there. 'Well, only two beside the first,' he said; 'they shut it up then.' 'Oh, did they?' said I. 'Well, they've opened it again. Number Seventeen's my room!'

" 'But you aren't going to *sleep* in it?' one of them said. And I explained that I didn't pay for a bedroom to keep awake in.

" 'I suppose it's press of business has made them open it up again,' the chap in spectacles said. 'It's a very mysterious affair. There's some secret horror about that room that we don't understand,' he said, 'and I'll tell you another queer thing. Every one of those poor chaps was a commercial gentleman. That's what I don't like about it. There was Bert Hatteras — he was the first, and a chap called Jones — Frederick Jones, and then Donald Overshaw — a Scotchman he was.'

"Well, we sat there and talked a bit, and if I hadn't been a Bond of Joy, I don't know that I mightn't have exceeded, gentlemen — yes, positively exceeded; for the more I thought about it, the less I liked the thought of Number Seventeen. I hadn't noticed the room particularly,

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except to see that the furniture had been changed since poor Fred's time. So I just slipped out, by and by, and I went out to the little glass case under the arch where the room-clerk sits — just like here, that hotel was — and I said:

" 'Look here, sir; haven't you another room empty except seventeen?'

" 'No,' he said; 'I don't think so.'

" 'Then what's that?' I said, and pointed to a key hanging on the board, the only one left.

" 'Oh,' he said, 'that's sixteen.'

" 'Anyone in sixteen?' I said. 'Is it a comfortable room?'

" 'No,' said he. 'Yes; quite comfortable. It's next door to yours — much the same class of room.'

" 'Then I'll have sixteen, if you've no objection,' I said.

"When I went up to bed I locked my door, and, though I didn't believe in ghosts, I wished seventeen wasn't next door to me, and I wished there wasn't a door between the two rooms, though the door was locked right enough and the key on my side. I'd only got the one candle besides the two on the dressing-table, which I hadn't lighted; and I got my collar and tie off before I noticed that the furniture in my new room was the furniture out of Number Seventeen; French bed with red curtains, mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse, and the carved mirror over the dressing-table between the two windows, and 'Belshazzar's Feast' over the mantelpiece. So that, though I'd not got the *room* where the commercial gentlemen had cut their throats, I'd got the *furniture* out of it.

"It was a silly thing to do — but we're all friends here and I don't mind owning up — I looked under the bed and I looked inside the hearse-wardrobe and I looked in a sort of narrow cupboard there was, where a body could have stood upright ——"

"A body?" I repeated.

"A man, I mean. You see, it seemed to me that either those poor chaps had been murdered by someone who hid himself in Number Seventeen to do it, or else there was something there that frightened them into cutting their throats; and upon my soul, I can't tell you which idea I liked least!"

He paused, and filled his pipe very deliberately. "Go on," someone said.

"Now, you'll observe," he said, "that all I've told you up to the time of my going to bed that night's just hearsay. So I don't ask you to believe it — though the three coroners' inquests would be enough to stagger most chaps, I should say. Still, what I'm going to tell you now's *my* part of the story — what happened to me."

He paused again, holding the pipe in his hand, unlighted.

There was a silence, which I broke.

"Well, what *did* happen?" I asked.

"I had a bit of a struggle with myself," he said. "I reminded myself it was not that room, but the next one that it had happened in. I smoked a pipe or two and read the morning paper, advertisements and all. And

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at last I went to bed. I left the candle burning, though, I own that."

"Did you sleep?" I asked.

"Yes. I slept. Sound as a top. I was awakened by a soft tapping on my door. I sat up. I don't think I've ever been so frightened in my life. But I made myself say, 'Who's there?' in a whisper. Heaven knows I never expected anyone to answer. The candle had gone out and it was pitch-dark. There was a quiet murmur and a shuffling sound outside. And no one answered. I tell you I hadn't expected anyone to. But I cleared my throat and cried out, 'Who's there?' in a real out-loud voice. And 'Me, sir,' said a voice. 'Shaving water; six o'clock, sir.'

"It was the chambermaid."

A movement of relief ran round our circle.

"I don't think much of your story," said the large commercial.

"You haven't heard it yet," said the story-teller, dryly. "It was six o'clock on a winter's morning, and pitch-dark. My train went at seven. I got up and began to dress. My one candle wasn't much use. I lighted the two on the dressing-table to see to shave by. There wasn't any shaving water outside my door, after all. And the passage was as black as a coal-hole. So I started to shave with cold water; one has to sometimes, you know. I'd gone over my face and I was just going lightly round under my chin, when I saw something move in the looking-glass. I mean something that moved was reflected in the looking-glass. The big door of the wardrobe had swung open, and by a sort of double reflection I could see the French bed with the red curtains. On the edge of it sat a man in his shirt and trousers — a man with black hair and whiskers, with the most awful look of despair and fear on his face that I've ever seen or dreamed of. I stood paralyzed, watching him in the mirror. I could not have turned round to save my life. Suddenly he laughed. It was a horrid, silent laugh, and showed all his teeth. They were very white and even. And the next moment he had cut his throat from ear to ear, there before my eyes. Did you ever see a man cut his throat?"

The story-teller had laid down his pipe, and he passed his hand over his face before he went on.

"When I could look round I did. There was no one in the room. The bed was as white as ever. Well, that's all," he said, abruptly, "except that now, of course, I understood how these poor chaps had come by their deaths. They'd all seen this horror — the ghost of the first poor chap, I suppose — Bert Hatteras, you know; and with the shock their hands must have slipped and their throats got cut before they could stop themselves. Oh! By the way, when I looked at my watch it was two o'clock; there hadn't been any chambermaid at all. I must have dreamed that. But I didn't dream the other. Oh! And one thing more. It was the same room. They hadn't changed the room, they'd only changed the number. *It was the same room!*"

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"Look here," said the heavy man; "the room you've been talking about. *My* room's sixteen. And it's got that same furniture in it as what you describe, and the same picture and all."

"Oh, has it?" said the story-teller. "I'm sorry. But the cat's out of the bag now, and it can't be helped. Yes, it *was* this house I was speaking of. I suppose they've opened the room again. But you don't believe in ghosts; *you'll* be all right."

"Yes," said the heavy man, and presently got up and left the room.

"He's gone to see if he can get his room changed. You see if he hasn't," said the rabbit-faced man.

The heavy man came back and settled into his chair.

"I could do with a drink," he said.

"I'll stand some punch, gentlemen, if you'll allow me," said our dapper story-teller. "I rather pride myself on my punch. I'll step out to the bar and get what I need for it."

"I thought he said he was a teetotaler," said the heavy traveler when he had gone. And then our voices buzzed like a hive of bees. When our story-teller came in again we turned on him — half a dozen of us at once.

"One at a time," he said, gently.

"We want to know," I said, "how it was — if seeing that ghost made all those chaps cut their throats by startling them when they were shaving — how was it *you* didn't cut *your* throat when you saw it?"

"I should have," he answered, gravely, "without the slightest doubt — I should have cut my throat, only," he glanced at our heavy friend, "I always shave with a safety razor. I travel in them," he added, slowly, and bisected a lemon.

"But — but," said the large man, when he could speak through our uproar, "I've given up my room."

"Yes," said the dapper man, squeezing the lemon; "I've just had my things moved into it. It's the best room in the house. I always think it worthwhile to take a little pains to secure it."

EDITORS' NOTE: *You will have noticed that in our editorial comment prefacing Edith Nesbit's "No. 17" we spoke only of the author herself, her background and her work. We gave not the slightest hint as to the plot of "No. 17." Now you realize why.*

Like J. Jefferson Farjeon's "Waiting for the Police," which appeared in the April 1946 issue of EQMM, "No. 17" is a brilliant example of what the English call a "leg-pull." Now, this is a rare type of fiction, especially in the detective-crime field. It must be written "straight," and presented to the reader, in the parlance of the theatre, completely dead-pan. Not the tiniest warning, however subtle, can be given to the reader in advance, since the effect of a "leg-pull" depends exclusively on the element of last-moment surprise. . . . "No. 17" fooled us to a fare-thee-well!

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THE NEEDLE'S EYE

by ELLERY QUEEN

THIS BEING A TALE of pirates and stolen treasure, it is a gratification to record that it all happened in that season of the year to which the moonstone and the poppy are traditionally dedicated. For the moonstone is a surprisingly moral object. To its lawful owner it brings nothing but good: held in the mouth at the full of the moon, it reveals the future; it heats the lover and it cools the heated; it cures epilepsy; it fructifies trees; and so on. But rue and blight upon him who lays thievish hands on it, for then it invokes the black side of its nature and brings down upon the thief nothing but evil. Such exact justice is unarguably desirable in a story of piracy which, while boasting no moonstones — although there were buckets of other gems — did reach its apogee in Augustus Caesar's month, which is the moonstone's month. And the poppy springs from the blood of the slain, its scarlet blooms growing thickest on battlefields and in places of carnage. So it is a poetic duty to report that there is murder in this August tale, too.

The sea-robber involved was master of the galley *Adventure*, a Scotsman who was thoroughly hanged in London's Execution Dock two centuries and a half ago — alas, on a day in May — and whose name ever since has stood for piracy in general. Ellery had tangled with historical characters before, but never with one so kindling as this; and it must be confessed that he embarked on the case of Captain Kidd's treasure with a relish more suitable to a small boy in his first hot pursuit of Mr. Legrand's golden *scarabaeus* than to a weary workman in words and the case-hardened son of a modern New York policeman.

And then there was Eric Ericsson.

Ericsson was that most tragic of men, an explorer in an age when nothing of original note remained on earth to be explored. He had had to content himself with being, not the first in anything, but the farthest, or the highest, or the deepest. Where five channels in the Northwest Passage were known, Ericsson opened a sixth. He found a peak in Sikang Province of western China, in the Amne Machin Range, which was almost a thousand feet higher than Everest, but he lost his instruments and his companions and Mount Everest remained on the books the highest mountain on the planet. Ericsson went farther and wider in the great Juf depression of the Sahara than the Citroën expedition, but this did not salve the nettling fact that other men had blazed the trail. And so it had gone all his life. Now in middle age, broken in health, Ericsson rested on his bitter fame — honorary fellowships and medals from all the proper learned societies, membership and

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officership in clubs like the Explorers', Cosmos, Athenæum — and brooded over his memories in his New York apartment or, occasionally, at the fireside of the old stone house on the island he owned off Montauk Point, Long Island.

Ellery had heard the story of William Kidd and Ericsson's Island as a result of his first meeting with Ericsson at the Explorers' Club. Not from Ericsson — their introduction had been by the way and their conversation brief; if any discoveries had been made it was by Ericsson, who explored Ellery with far swifter economy than that explorer in other spheres would have believed possible of anyone but himself. Then the large, burned, bowed man had shuffled off, leaving Ellery to quiz his host of the evening, a cartographer of eminence. When this amiable personage mentioned Ericsson's Island and the buccaneer of the *Adventure* in adjoining breaths, Ellery's bow plunged into the wind.

"You mean you've never heard that yarn?" asked the cartographer with the incredulity of the knowledgeable man. "I thought everyone had!" And he gripped his glass and set sail.

An Ericsson had taken possession of the little island in the fourth quarter of the Seventeenth Century, and he had managed to hold on to it through all the proprietary conflicts of that brawling era. Along the way the Northman acquired a royal patent which somehow weathered the long voyage of colonial and American history.

"Now did Kidd know Ericsson's Island?" asked the cartographer, settling himself as if for argument. "The circumstantial evidence is good. We know that in 1691, for instance, he was awarded £150 by the council of New York for his services during the disturbances in the colony 'after the rebellion of 1688.' And then, of course, there was the treasure found on Gardiner's Island off the tip of Long Island after Kidd's arrest in 1699 on a charge of murder and piracy. On a clear day you can see Ericsson's Island from Gardiner's Island with a glass. How could he have missed it?"

"It's your story," said Ellery judicially. "Go on."

William Kidd served respectably against the French in the West Indies, the cartographer continued, and in 1695 he was in London. Recommended as fit to command a vessel for the king, Captain Kidd received the royal commission to arrest all freebooters and *boucaniers*, and he sailed the galley *Adventure* from Plymouth in 1696 into a life, not of arresting pirates, but of outpirating them.

"The rest is history," said the cartographer, "although some of it is dubious history. We do know that in 1698 or thereabout he was in these parts in a small sloop. Well, the story has persisted for two hundred and fifty years that during this period — when Kidd deserted the *Adventure*

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in Madagascar and took to the sloop, eventually working his way to these waters — he paid a visit to Ericsson's Island."

"To Gardiner's Island," corrected Ellery.

"*And* Ericsson's," said his host stubbornly. "Why not? About £14,000 was recovered from Kidd's vessel and from Gardiner's Island afterward; there must have been a great deal more than that. Why, John Avery — 'Long Ben' — once grabbed off 100,000 pieces of eight in a single haul, and a Mogul's daughter to boot!

"What happened to the rest of Kidd's booty? Is it likely he'd have cached it all in one place? He knew he was in for serious trouble — he tried to bribe Governor Bellomont, you'll recall. And with Ericsson's Island so handy. . . ."

"What's the story?" murmured Ellery.

"Oh, that he put into the cove there with a small boat one night, by a ruse got into the Ericsson house — the original's still standing, by the way, beautifully preserved — gave Ericsson and his family fifteen minutes to get off the island, and used the place as his headquarters for a few days. When Kidd cleared out, to be seized and shipped to England shortly after, the Ericssons went back to their island —"

"And perforated it fore and aft and amidships for the treasure Kidd presumably buried there," said Ellery, trying to sound amused.

"Well, certainly," said the cartographer peevishly. "Wouldn't you have?"

"But they never found it."

"Neither they nor their heirs or assigns. But that doesn't mean it isn't there, Queen."

"Doesn't mean it is, either."

Nevertheless, Ellery went home that night feeling as if he had spent the evening in a hurricane off the Spanish Main, clinging to the wild rigging.

It was not quite two weeks later, in a mid-August spell of Dry Tortugan weather, that Eric Ericsson telephoned. The explorer sounded remote, as if deep — at least six fathoms deep — affairs were on his mind.

"Could you see me confidentially, Mr. Queen? I know you're a busy man, but if it's possible —"

"Are you calling from town, Mr. Ericsson?"

"Yes."

"You come right on over!"

Nikki could not understand Ellery's excitement. "Buried treasure," she sniffed. "A grown man."

"Women," pontificated Mr. Queen, "have no imagination."

"I suppose that's true," said his secretary coolly, "if you mean the kind that heats up at a bucket of nasty-gore and a couple of rum-soaked yo-ho-hos. Who ever heard of a lady pirate?"

"Two of the bloodiest pirates in business were Anne Bonny and Mary Read."

"Then they were no ladies!"

Twenty minutes later the doorbell

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rang and Nikki, still sniffishly, admitted the owner of the island whose clamshells had once been crunched by the tread of Captain Kidd and his cutthroat crew.

"Glad you didn't waste any time getting here, Mr. Ericsson," said Ellery enthusiastically. "The sooner we get going on it —"

"You know why I'm here?" The explorer frowned.

"It doesn't take a math shark to put a couple of twos together."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, come, Mr. Ericsson," chortled Ellery. "If it's Nikki you're worried about, I assure you that not only is she the custodian of all my secrets, she also has no interest whatsoever in buried treasure."

"Buried treasure?" Ericsson waved a charred hand impatiently. "That's not what I wanted to see you about."

"It's . . . not?"

"I've never put any stock in that yarn, Mr. Queen. In fact, the whole picture of Kidd as a pirate in my opinion is a myth and an historical libel. Kidd was the goat of a political intrigue, I'm convinced, not a pirate at all. Dalton's book presented some pretty conclusive evidence. If it's real pirates you're after, look up Bartholomew Roberts. Roberts took over four hundred ships during his career."

"Then the story of Kidd's seizure of Ericsson's Island —?"

"He may have visited the island around 1698, but if it was to bury anything I've never seen the slightest evidence of it. Mr. Queen, I'd like to tell you why I came."

"Yes," sighed Ellery, and Nikki felt almost sorry for him.

Ericsson's problem involved romance, but not the kind that glittered under pirate moons. His only sister, a widow, had died shortly after Ericsson's retirement, leaving a daughter. The explorer's relationship with his sister had been distant, and he had last seen her child, Inga, as a leggy creature of twelve with a purple pimple on her nose. But at the sister's funeral he found himself embraced as "Uncle Eric" by a golden Norse goddess of nineteen. His niece was alone in the world and she had clung to him. Ericsson, a bachelor, found the girl filling a need he had never dreamed existed. Inga left college and came to live with him as his ward, the consolation of his empty retirement, and the sole heir of his modest fortune.

At first they were inseparable — in Ericsson's New York household, at the stone house on the island during long weekends. But Inga began to glow, and the moths came. They were young moths and they rather interfered. So Ericsson — selfishly, he admitted — had his yacht refurbished and sailed Inga away on a cruise of the Caribbean.

"Biggest mistake of my life," the explorer shrugged. "We stopped over in the Bahamas, and there Inga met a young Britisher, Anthony Hobbes-Watkins, who was living a gentlemanly beachcomber sort of existence out on Lyford Cay, at the other end

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of New Providence Island. It was Inga's first serious love affair. I should have taken her away immediately. When I woke up, it was too late."

"Elopement?" asked Nikki hopefully.

"No, no, Miss Porter, it was a cathedral wedding. I couldn't stand in Inga's way. And I really had nothing definite to go on."

Ellery said: "There's something fishy about Hobbes-Watkins?"

"I don't know, Mr. Queen." Ericsson's heavy, burned-out face remained expressionless, but not his eyes. "That's what I want you to find out."

"What do you know about him?"

"Only what he's told me and a few things I've picked up. Captaincy in the RAF during the war, and not much of anything since — I don't hold that against him, it's a rocky world. All the British upper-class attainments — shoots well, plays an earnest game of polo, grouses about the fading star of empire; that sort of thing. Knew all the right people in Nassau; but he hadn't been there long.

"His father, a Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, came on from somewhere — England, he said — for the wedding," continued the explorer, and he shrugged again. "A stout, red, loud, horsy specimen, nearly a caricature, of his type. They seem to have plenty of money, so it can't be that. But there *is* . . . something, a mystery, a vagueness about them that keeps disturbing me. They're like figures on a movie screen — you see them move, you hear them talk, but they never seem flesh and blood. Two-dimensional . . . I'm not saying this well," said Ericsson, flushing. "When a man's tramped mountains and deserts and jungles all his life, as I have, he develops an extra sense." He looked up. "I don't trust them."

"I suppose," said Nikki, "your niece does."

"Well, Inga's young and unsophisticated, and she's very much in love. That's what makes it so awkward. But she's become important to me, and for her sake I can't let this go on unless I'm satisfied she hasn't made some awful mistake."

"Have you noticed anything different since the wedding, Mr. Ericsson?" asked Ellery. "A change in their attitude?"

The explorer scraped the back of his neck with a limp handkerchief. But he said defiantly, "They whisper together."

Ellery raised his brows.

But Ericsson went on doggedly. "Right after the wedding Colonel Hobbes-Watkins left for the States. On business, he said. I gave the yacht to Inga and Tony for a three-week honeymoon. On their way back they picked me up in Nassau and we sailed up to New York, meeting Tony's father here . . . On three different occasions I've come on the Hobbes-Watkinses having whispered conversations which break off like a shot. I don't like it, Mr. Queen. I don't like it to such an extent," said Ericsson

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quietly, "that I've deliberately kept us all in the city instead of doing the sensible thing in this heat and living down at the island. My island is pretty isolated, and it would make the ideal setting for a . . . Instead of which, Tony and Inga have my apartment, I'm stopping at one of my clubs, and the Colonel is sweating it out politely in a midtown hotel — business, unspecified, still keeping him in the States. But I can't stall any longer. Inga's been after me now for weeks to shove off for the Point, and she's beginning to look at me queerly. I've had to promise we'd all go down this weekend for the rest of the summer."

"It would make the ideal setting," said Ellery, "for a what?"

"You'll think I'm cracked."

"For a what, Mr. Ericsson?"

"All right!" The explorer gripped the arms of his chair. "For a murder," he muttered.

Nikki stared. "Oh, I'm sure —" she began.

But Ellery's foot shifted and somehow crushed Nikki's little toe. "Murder of whom, Mr. Ericsson?"

"Inga! Me! Both of us — I don't know!" He controlled himself with an effort. "Maybe I'm hallucinated. But I tell you those two are scoundrels and my island would be a perfect place for whatever they're up to. What I'd like you to do, Mr. Queen, is come down this weekend for an indefinite stay. Will you?"

Ellery glanced at his secretary; Nikki was often his umpire when he was playing the game of working. But she was regarding him with the grim smile of a spectator.

"Come down, too, Miss Porter," said the explorer, misinterpreting the glance. "Inga will love having you. Besides, your coming will make it appear purely social. I don't want Inga having the least suspicion that . . . Don't bother about a wardrobe; we lead the most primitive life on the island. And there's plenty of room; the house has tripled its original size. About the fee, Mr. Queen —"

"We'll discuss fees," murmured Ellery, "when there's something to charge a fee for. We'll be there, Mr. Ericsson. I can't leave, however, before Saturday morning. When are you planning to go down?"

"Friday." The explorer looked worried.

"I don't imagine they'd try anything the very first night," said Ellery soothingly. "And you're not exactly a helpless old gaffer."

"Good lord! You don't think it's myself I'm concerned about! It's Inga . . . married and . . ." Ericsson stopped abruptly. Then he smiled and rose. "Of course you're right. I'll have the launch waiting for you at Montauk Point. You don't know how this relieves me."

"But won't your niece suspect something by the mere fact of Ellery's being invited down?" asked Nikki. "Unless, Ellery, you cook up one of your stories."

"How's this?" beamed Ellery. "I met Mr. Ericsson at the Explorers'

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Club recently, heard the family tale about Captain Kidd's treasure, I couldn't resist it, and I'm coming down to try to solve a two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old mystery. Simple?"

"Simply perfect," exclaimed Ericsson. "Inga's had them half-believing the yarn ever since the Bahamas, and if I talk it up for the rest of the week you'll have them under your feet — they'll follow you around like tourists. See you both Saturday."

"It's simple, all right," said Nikki when the explorer had gone. "The simple truth! Shall I pack your extra cutlass, my bucko — and a couple of all-day suckers?"

Eric Ericsson and his niece met them at Montauk Point Saturday morning and hurtled them over blue water in a noisy launch. It was hard to think of wickedness. Inga was a big solid blonde girl with the uncomplicated loveliness of the North, friendly and charming and — Nikki thought — happy as a newlywed could be. The day was stainless, the sun brilliant, the horizon picketed with racing sails; a salt breeze blew the girls' hair about, and the world looked a jolly place. Even Ericsson was composed, as if he had slept unexpectedly well or the presence of serene, golden-legged Inga gave him the strength to dissemble his fears.

"I think it's so thrilling," Inga cried over the roar of the launch. "And Tony and the Colonel have talked of nothing else since Uncle Eric told us why you were coming down, Mr. Queen. Do you really feel there's hope?"

"I try to," Ellery shouted. "By the way, I'm disappointed. I thought your husband and father-in-law might be with you in the launch."

"Oh, that's Uncle Eric's fault," the girl said, and the explorer smiled. "He kidnaped me before I could scream for help."

"Guilty." Ericsson's grip on the wheel gave the lie to his smile. "I don't see much of you now that you're Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins."

"Darling, I'm glad you kidnaped me. I really am."

"Even though Mr. Hobbes-Watkins is probably fit to be tied?"

Inga looked happy.

But Nikki, the sun notwithstanding, felt a chill. Ericsson had been afraid to leave Inga alone on the island with her husband and father-in-law.

Ellery kept chattering to Inga about the paragon she had married, while Ericsson stood quietly over the wheel. Nikki could have told the great man that he was wasting his celebrated breath: the girl was in the first heaven of wedded bliss, where the beloved hangs in space clothed in perfect light and there is no past.

From the horizon rose a seaweed-hung otter with a fish in its mouth, which changed rapidly into a long low-lying island thinly wooded and running down to a white beach and a pretty cove. As the launch drew near, they made out a shed, a boathouse, and a jetty. A lank, disjointed something stuck up from the jetty like a

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piece of driftwood. It turned surprisingly into a one-legged old man. His left leg was gone at the knee; the trouser of his bleached, fishy jeans was pinned back over the stump; and to the stump there was strapped a crude, massive pegleg. With a skin resembling the shed's corrugated roof, a nose that was a twist of bone, crafty and secretive eyes, and a greasy bandanna tied behind his ears against the sun, the peglegged old man looked remarkably like a pirate; and Nikki said so.

"That's why we call him Long John," Inga said as her uncle maneuvered the launch toward the jetty. "At least Tony and I do. Uncle Eric calls him Fleugelheimer, or something as ridiculous, though I suppose it's his name. He's not very bright, and he has no manners at all. Hi, Long John!" she called. "Catch the line."

The old man hopped sidewise with great agility and caught the line, poorly tossed, in his powerful right hand. Immediately he wheeled on Ericsson, his bony jaws grinding.

"Bloodsucker!" he yelled.

"Now, John," said the explorer.

"When ye givin' me more money?"

"John, we have guests . . ."

"Or d'ye want me to quit? Ye want me to quit!"

"Make the line fast," said Ericsson with a faint smile.

"I'm a poor man," whined the old pirate, obeying. Suddenly he squinted sidewise at Ellery. "This the great detecative?"

"Yes, John."

"Henh!" said Long John, and he spat into the water, grinning evilly. He seemed to have forgotten all about his grievance.

"He's been on the island for years," Ericsson explained as they went up a rough path in the woods. "My caretaker. Surly old devil — not all there. He's a miser — hoards every penny I give him, and keeps dunning me for more with the regularity of a parrot. I ignore him and we get along fine."

And there was the stone house at the hump of the island's back. Clean wings stretched from a central building whose stones were grimy with weathered age. The old part of the house rose in a clapboard tower. The tower was square, with several small windows from which, Ellery thought, the whole island and a great spread of the sea must be visible. Undoubtedly the lookout tower of the original structure.

To one side of the house someone — Ericsson, or one of his more recent forebears — had built a rough but comfortable terrace. It was paved with oyster shells and there was a huge barbecue pit.

Two men — one portly and middle-aged, the other slim and young — rose from deckchairs waving frosty glasses.

And the instant Ellery laid eyes on the Hobbes-Watkinses he knew Eric Ericsson had been right.

It was hard to say why. They were almost professionally British, espe-

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cially Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, but that did not account for it; and for the rest of the day Ellery devoted himself to this riddle. He did not solve it.

On the surface the men were plausible. Inga's husband was handsome in a thin, underdone way; he slouched and lolled as if he were hopelessly tired; speech seemed forced out of him; and he drank a good deal. This was the very picture of the young post-war European, spoiled, sick, and disenchanted. Still . . . The elder Hobbes-Watkins was Colonel Blimp to the life, fussing and blustery and full of old-fashioned prejudices. A warmed-over mutton roast, as Nikki promptly dubbed him in a mumble. But there was something in the Colonel's bloated eye and occasionally in his blasting tone that had a lean and cynical energy in it, not at all in character.

During the afternoon Ellery, playing his role of historical detective, set off on a survey of the island. Inga, Tony, and the Colonel insisted on accompanying him.

Long John was fishing from a dory off the cove. When he spied them, he deliberately turned his back.

Ellery began to saunter along the beach, the others trotting eagerly behind.

"Needn't be bashful," he called, mindful of Inga between the two ogres at his back. "I'm merely casing the joint. Come up here, Inga."

"Casing the joint," wheezed Colonel Hobbes-Watkins. "Very good, haha! But I say, won't we trample the clues?"

"Not much danger of that, Colonel," said Ellery cheerfully, "after two and a half centuries. Inga, do join me."

"Glad I ambled along," said Tony Hobbes-Watkins in a languid voice. It sounded queerly dutiful for a groom. Ellery was conscious of the man's eyes; they kept a staring watch.

They went around the island in an hour. It was long and narrow and swelled to a ridge in the middle. The vegetation was scrubby and poor. There was no close anchorage except off the cove. None of the trees, which might have been landmarks, looked old; the island was exposed to the sea, and centuries of winter gales had kept it pruned.

"I don't suppose," Ellery asked Inga as they climbed the path back to the house in the dusk, "the story has ever had any documentation? Chart, map — anything like that?"

"Nothing that still exists. But it's said that there was once a letter or diary page or something left by the 1698 Ericsson — it's been lost, if it ever existed at all — telling about the clue in Captain Kidd's room, and of course that's been the big mystery ever since."

"Clue? Kidd's room?" exclaimed Ellery. "No one's mentioned that!"

"Didn't Eric tell you?" murmured the younger Englishman. "Fantastic fellow, Eric. No imagination."

"I wondered why you hadn't steamed up there immejiately," panted

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the Colonel. "Fancy your uncle's not telling Mr. Queen the most exciting part of it, Inga! It's the chamber the pirate watched the sea from when he took the island over — didn't you say, my dear?"

"The tower room," said Inga, pointing through the dusk. "*That* was in the lost letter, and the reference to the clue Kidd left there."

"Clue left in the tower room?" Ellery squinted through the twilight hungrily. "And that's the original room up there, Inga?"

"Yes."

"What was the clue?"

But the terrace and Long John at the barbecue pit intervened; and since the one-legged caretaker was brandishing a veritable trident as he glowered at the latecomers, Ellery was not answered.

They had dinner.

A great moon rose, and the air turned chilly. Ellery wandered to the edge of the terrace with his plate, and a moment later Eric Ericsson joined him.

"Well?" the explorer asked.

"Nothing tangible, Mr. Ericsson. But I agree — there's something in the wind."

"What about tonight? I've put you next to the Colonel's room, and I have an automatic, but Inga . . . alone with . . ."

"I've already fixed that. Nikki is all things to all men, and tonight she's going to be so nervous in this primeval setting that she'll just have to sleep with somebody. Since she's had a strict upbringing, that means with Inga, the only other female here. A dirty trick to play on a new husband," said Ellery dryly, "but Tony can console himself with the prospect of a good night's sleep in the room next to mine." Ericsson pressed Ellery's arm rather pathetically. "For the rest of the evening, Mr. Ericsson," murmured Ellery, "please follow my lead. I'm going to be treasure-hunting like mad."

"Ha. Caught you whispering," said a voice at Ellery's elbow; it was young Hobbes-Watkins with a glass in his hand. "Pumping Eric about that clue, eh, Queen?"

"We were just getting round to it," said Ellery. "Girls couldn't take it, I see." Inga and Nikki were gone.

"Driven to cover by the mosquitoes and gnats," boomed the Colonel, slapping himself. "Lovely children, but females, what? Ah, there, you dog, don't shake your head at your old bachelor father! The moon's bloody, and it's the hour for high adventure, didn't some chap say? About that clue, Mr. Queen . . ."

"Yes, you never said a word to me about Captain Kidd's room, Mr. Ericsson," said Ellery reproachfully. "What's all this about a clue he's supposed to have left up there?"

"It's characteristically cryptic," said the explorer, pouring coffee. "The legend says that just before Kidd was to be hanged in London he sent a letter to my ancestor admitting that he'd buried a treasure on Ericsson's Island in '98, and saying that 'to find

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it you must look through the eye of the needle.' "

"Eye of the needle," said Ellery. "Eye of which needle?"

"Ah!" said Colonel Hobbes-Watkins ominously. "There's the rub, as the Bard says. No one knows — eh, Ericsson?"

"I'm afraid not, Colonel. And no one ever will, because it's all moonshine."

"Don't see why you say that, Eric, at all," said Tony, almost energetically. "Could have been a needle!"

"Even if there had been," Ericsson smiled in his moonshine, "two hundred and fifty years make a large haystack."

"One moment!" said Ellery. "Look through the eye of the needle *in the tower room*, Mr. Ericsson?"

"That's how it goes."

"What's in that room?"

"Nothing at all. Just four walls, a floor, and a ceiling. I assure you, Mr. Queen, everything's been tried — unsuccessfully — from hunting for a peculiar rock formation to conjuring up a tree fork viewed from a certain angle from the windows."

Ellery stared up at the tower. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "How do I get up there?"

"There's the sleuth for you!" cried Colonel Hobbes-Watkins, hurling himself from his chair. "Been itching to have a go at that ruddy room myself!"

"But Eric's been so discouraging," murmured his son.

Nikki and Inga had their heads together before the fireplace, where Long John was laying a fire. Inga fell behind to say something to her young husband, who glanced quickly at Nikki and then shrugged.

The explorer led the way up a tiny narrow coiling staircase, holding a kerosene lamp high. "The tower's never been electrified," he called down, his deep voice reverberating. "Better use those flashlights or you'll break your necks on these stairs."

"Eeee," said Nikki convincingly; but it was only a dried-up wasps' nest. The stairs sagged at every step.

The climb ended in a little landing and a heavy door of blackened oak and hand-forged iron. Ericsson set his big shoulder to the door. It gave angrily. The lamp bobbed off.

"A couple of you had better stay on the landing. This floor may not hold up under so much weight. Come in, Mr. Queen."

It was scarcely more than a large closet with miniature square windows. A floor of dirt-glazed random boards, undulant like the sea; a raftered ceiling only a few inches above the men's heads; and four papered walls. And that was all, except for dust and cobwebs. The windows, of imperfectly blown glass, were closed.

"Open them, Ellery," choked Nikki from the doorway. "You can't breathe up here."

"You can't open them," said Inga. "They've been stuck fast for six generations."

Ellery stood in the middle of the room looking about.

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"Aren't you going to get down on all fours, Mr. Queen?" bellowed the Colonel from the landing. "Like the fellow from Baker Street?"

"I find these walls much more interesting."

But the only thing Nikki could see on the walls was the wallpaper. The paper showed an imitation colored marble design on a grainy background — ugly as sin, Nikki thought, and even uglier for being faded and mildewed in great patches.

Ellery was at one of the walls now, actually caressing it, holding the lamp close to the marbled paper. Finally, he began at a corner and went over the paper inch by inch, from ceiling to floor. At one point he examined something for a long time. Then he resumed his deliberate inspection, and he neither spoke nor looked around until he had completed his tour of the room.

"This wallpaper," he said. "Do you know, Mr. Ericsson, what you have here?"

"Dash it all, sir," interrupted the Colonel explosively, "are you treasure-hunting, or what?"

"The wallpaper?" Ericsson frowned. "All I know about it is that it's very old."

"To be exact, late Seventeenth Century," said Ellery. "This is genuine flock paper, made by the famous Dunbar of Aldermanbury. It's probably quite valuable."

"There's a treasure for you," wailed Inga.

"If so," shrugged her uncle, "it's the first I've run across on the island."

"There may be a second," said Ellery. "If we look through the eye of the needle."

"Don't tell me, Queen," said Inga's husband with what might have been animation, "you've spotted something."

"Yes."

The Hobbes-Watkinses made admiring sounds and Inga embraced her spouse. The explorer seemed stunned.

"Do you mean to say," demanded Nikki in a loud voice, "that you walk into a strange room and in ten minutes solve a mystery that's baffled everybody for two hundred and fifty years? Come, come, Mr. Q!"

"It's still only theory," said Ellery apologetically. "Inga, may I borrow a broom?"

"A broom!"

Inga, Tony, and the Colonel shouted chaotically down the tower stairs for Long John to fetch the best broom on the premises. Then they ran into the little room and danced around Ellery.

"If the yarn is true at all," Ellery said, "Kidd couldn't have meant it literally when he instructed your ancestor, Mr. Ericsson, to 'look through the eye of the needle.' The early treasure-hunters saw that at once, or they wouldn't have looked for peculiar rock and tree formations. They just didn't look close enough to home. It was under their noses all the time."

"*What* was under their noses all the time?" asked Nikki.

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"The marble design on this wallpaper. Marble's unique characteristic is its veining. Look at these veins in the pattern. Some are long and thin, tapering to a point —"

"*Like needles*," said the explorer slowly.

Everyone began scuttling along a wall.

"But where's one with an opening?" shrieked Inga. "Oh, I can't find a — a bloody eye!"

"An eye, an eye," mumbled the Colonel feverishly. "There must be one with an eye!"

"There is," said Ellery. "Just one, and here it is over near this window."

And while they stared in awe at the place on the wall beyond the tip of Ellery's forefinger, Long John's boot and pegleg stumped into the tower room.

"Broom." He flung it.

Ellery seized it, placed the end of the broom handle on the open space in the needle-shaped vein, said with piety, "Let us pray," and pushed.

There was a ripping sound and the broom handle burst through the wallpaper and sank into the wall. Ellery kept pushing gently. The handle slid out of sight up to the sweep.

Ellery withdrew the broom and stepped back.

"Mr. Ericsson," he said, not without emotion, "the honor of the first look is yours."

"Well, don't just crouch there, Uncle Eric!" moaned Inga. "What do you see?"

"Can you see *anything?*"

"But he must — there's a bright moon!"

"Now, my dears, give the old chap a chance —"

"I see," said Eric Ericsson slowly, "a bit of the northeast shoreline. You know the place, Inga. It's that postage-stamp patch of beach with the slight overhang of flat rock. Where you've sunbathed."

"Let me see!"

"Let me!"

"It is!"

"It can't be. By George, not really —"

"What luck!"

There was a great deal of confusion.

Ellery said rapidly, "Mr. Ericsson, since you know just where the place is, take a hurricane lamp and a stake and get down there. We'll keep watch through the peephole. When we've got your lamp in the center of our sight, we'll signal with a flashlight three times from this window. Drive your stake into the sand at that point, and we'll join you there with shovels."

"I'll get 'em!" shrieked a voice; and they turned to see Long John's peg vanishing.

Fifteen minutes later, with Inga sprinting ahead, they thrashed through the scrub toward the explorer's light.

They found Ericsson standing on an outcrop of silvery rock, smiling. "No hurry," he said. "And no treasure — not till low tide tomorrow morning, anyway."

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Ericsson's stake was protruding from four and a half feet of ocean.

Nikki found herself able to play the part of a nervous city female with no difficulty at all. How could Inga *sleep?* she thought as she thrashed about in the twin bed. When in a few hours she was going to be the heiress of a pirate's treasure? . . . The . . . *piracy* of that pirate . . . to bury it so that for half the elapsed time the Atlantic rolled over it . . . He ought to be hanged. . . .

Then Nikki remembered that he *had* been hanged; and that was her last thought until a hand clamped over her mouth and a light flashed briefly into her eyes and Ellery's voice said affectionately in her ear, "You certainly sleep soundly. Get into some clothes and join me outside. And don't wake anyone or I'll give you a taste of the cat."

Nikki slipped out of the house into a dead and lightless world. She could not even make out the terrace. But Ellery rose out of the void and led her down the path and into the woods, his grip forbidding noise. Not until they had gone several hundred yards did he turn on his flashlight, and even then he cupped its beam.

"Is it all right to talk now?" Nikki asked coldly. "What time is it? Where are we going? And why are you practically naked? And do you think this is cricket? After all, Ellery, it's not your treasure."

"It's not quite four, we're getting the jump on our friends, I expect it will be wet and mucky work, and pirate loot calls for pirate methods. Would you rather go back to your hot little bed?"

"No," said Nikki. "Though it all sounds pretty juvenile to me. How can you dig through sea water?"

"Low tide at 4:29 A.M. — I checked with a tide table at the house."

Nikki began to feel excited all over again.

And she almost burst into a yo-ho-ho when they came out on the flat rock and saw Ericsson's stake below them lapped by a mere inch or two of water. . . .

The sun made its appearance with felicity. The first sliver of fried-egg radiance slipped over the edge of the sea's blue plate just as Ellery's spade rang a sort of breakfast bell. Nikki, who was flat on the wet sand with her head in the hole, and Ellery, whose salted hair bobbed a foot below Nikki's chin, responded to the sound with hungry cries.

"It's a metal box, Nikki!"

"Whee!"

"*Don't* come down here! Get that windlass ready."

"Where? What's a windlass?"

"That drum up there for hoisting!" Before turning in the previous night the men had lugged all the portable paraphernalia they could find in the shed down to the site of the treasure. "And unwind the line and pay it down to me —"

"Yaaaaa-hoo!" Nikki ran around in her little bare feet madly.

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Twenty minutes later they knelt panting on the sand at the edge of the hole, staring at a brassbound iron chest with a fat convex lid. It was a black and green mass of corruption. Shreds of crumbled stuff told where leather had once been strapped. And the chest was heavy —

"Can you open it?" whispered Nikki.

Ellery set the heels of his hands on the edge of the lid and got his shoulders ready. The lid cracked off like a rotten nutshell.

Nikki gulped. The celestial egg was sunny-side up now, and beneath it a million little frying lights danced.

The chest was heaped with jewels.

"Diamonds," said Nikki dreamily. "Rubies. Emeralds. Pearls. Sapphires. So pretty. Look, Ellery. The booty of a real pirate. Wrenched from the throats and arms of dead Spanish women —"

"And the jewels in turn wrenched from their settings," muttered Ellery, "most of which were probably melted down. But here are some they overlooked. An empty gold setting. A silver one —"

"Here are more silver ones, Ellery . . ."

"Those aren't silver." Ellery picked one up. "This is platinum, Nikki . . ."

"And look at those old coins! What's this one?"

"What?"

"This coin!"

"Oh? *El peso duro*. A piece of eight."

"Gosh . . ." Nikki suddenly thrust both hands into the chest.

And at this precise moment, through the young air of the island's morning, there came a dull crack, like the faraway slam of a door, and quickly after — so quickly it sounded like an echo of the first — another.

Ellery vaulted across the hole and leaped onto the flat rock. "Nikki, those were gunshots —"

"Huh?" Nikki was still on a quarterdeck with her jewels. "But Ellery — the treasure! You can't leave —"

But Ellery was gone.

They found Eric Ericsson in a robe and slippers lying in the doorway of Captain Kidd's roost, across the sill. He had tumbled headfirst into the empty room. In his right hand there was a .38 automatic pistol.

When they turned him over they saw a red hole in his forehead and red thickening fluid on the floor where the forehead had rested.

His body was still warm.

Ellery got up, and he said to the Hobbes-Watkinses and the marble-faced girl and the one-legged caretaker and Nikki, "We will go downstairs now and we will bar the tower door." So they went downstairs quietly, and Ellery excused himself for a moment and disappeared in his room, and when he appeared again he had a police revolver in his hand. "Nikki, you and Inga will take the launch and go over to the mainland and notify the Coast Guard and the Suffolk County police; there's no

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phone here. You won't come back until someone in authority can come with you. You gentlemen will wait here with me — with me, that is, and my shooting iron."

Late that day Ellery came downstairs from the tower room and conferred with the Coast Guard officer and the police captain from the mainland. Finally he said, "I appreciate that. It's something I owe poor Ericsson," and he waited until the people were brought in and seated before him.

The hearty bloat had gone out of Colonel Hobbes-Watkins; it was supplanted wholly by the muscular alertness Ellery had glimpsed the day before. Tony Hobbes-Watkins was very still, but he was no longer remotely languid. Inga was the palest projection of herself. Even Long John jiggled his peg nervously.

"Fifteen minutes or so after sunrise this morning," Ellery began, "just about the time I was down at the beach opening the treasure chest, Eric Ericsson was climbing the stairs in this house to the tower room. He was in his robe and slippers, and he carried his .38 automatic, with a full clip. His bedroom is below the tower shaft, which acts as an amplifier; evidently he was awakened by some noise from the tower room and decided to investigate. He took a gun with him because, even in his own house, he was afraid to be without it."

"I say —" began the Colonel furiously; but he did not say after all, he wiped the rolls on his neck.

"Someone was in the tower room. What was this person doing there — at dawn, in an empty room? There is only one thing of utility in that room — the peephole I punctured through the wall last night. The person Ericsson heard was watching me through the peephole. Watching me dig up the treasure."

They stared at him.

"Ericsson came to the landing and flung open the door. The man at the peephole whirled. Maybe they talked for a little while; maybe Ericsson was put off his guard. His gun came down, and the man across the room whipped out a revolver and fired a .25 caliber bullet into Ericsson's head, killing him instantly. But Ericsson's automatic had come up again instinctively as his murderer drew, and it went off, too — a split-second after the murderer's. We know two shots were fired almost simultaneously because Miss Porter and I heard them, and because we found a .25 caliber bullet in Ericsson's head and a .38 shell on the floor near Ericsson's .38 automatic."

And Ellery said clearly, "The murderer ran down the tower stairs after the shots, heard the others coming — you'd all been awakened by the shots and dashed out of your rooms at once, you've said — realized he was trapped, and thereupon did the only thing he could: he pretended that he, too, had been awakened by the shots and he ran *back* up the stairs with the rest of you. The gun he managed to dispose

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of before I got back to the house from the beach.

"One of you," said Ellery, "was that murderer.

"Which one was it?"

There was no sound in the room at all.

"We found the empty shell of Ericsson's discharged cartridge, as I say, near his body. He had fired once at his murderer, his automatic had ejected the shell, and the bullet had sped on its way.

"But here is the interesting fact: *We haven't found Ericsson's bullet.*"

Ellery leaned their way. "The tower room has been gone over all day by these officers and me. The bullet isn't there. There is no sign of it or its passage anywhere in the room — floor, walls, ceiling. The windows remain intact. They weren't open at the time of Ericsson's shot; as you remarked yesterday, Inga, they've been stuck fast for generations; and when we tried to open them today without breaking something, we failed.

"Nor did Ericsson's shot go wild. He was killed instantly, falling into the room headfirst; this means that when he fired, he was facing into the room. But just to be thorough, we went over the landing and the tower shaft, too. No bullet, no bullet mark, and no slightest opening through which the bullet might have passed."

"The peephole!" Nikki said involuntarily.

"No. There is considerable thickness to the walls. Ericsson in the doorway was at an extremely acute angle to the peephole. So while the bullet conceivably might have passed through the opening of the hole inside the tower room, it would have to have lodged inside the wall, or at least left some sign of its passage if it went clear through. We've torn down part of the wall to get a look inside. There is no bullet and no mark of a bullet.

"So the extraordinary fact is that while Ericsson's bullet must have struck something in that room, there is no sign of its having done so.

"Impossible? No.

"There is one logical explanation."

And Ellery said, "The bullet must have struck the only thing in that room which left it — the murderer. *One of you is concealing a bullet wound.*"

Ellery turned to the silent officers. "Let's have these three men stripped to the skin. And Nikki," he added, "you go somewhere with Inga — yes, I said Inga! — and do likewise."

And when the Colonel, raging, had been reduced to his fundamental pinkness, and his intent son stood similarly unclothed, and when what there was of Long John was grimly revealed also — and no wound was found on any of them, not so much as a scratch — Ellery merely blinked and faced the door through which Nikki had taken the murdered man's niece, the heir to his fortune and the treasure.

And the men redressed quickly, as if time were at their heels.

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And when Nikki came back with Inga the police captain asked, "Where is Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins' wound, Miss Porter?"

"Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins," replied Nikki, "has no wound."

"No . . .?"

"Maybe," said the Coast Guard officer awkwardly, "maybe you didn't look — uh —"

"And maybe I did," said Nikki with a sweet smile. "I work for the great Ellery Queen . . . you know?"

So now the two officers turned to look at the great Ellery Queen, but with no appreciation of his greatness at all.

And the Coast Guard officer said, "Well," and the police captain from the mainland did not say even that but turned on his heel.

He turned immediately back. For Ellery was growling, "If that's the case, it's obvious who killed Ericsson."

And Ellery produced a cigarette and a lighter and went to work on them, and then he said, "It all goes back to what I dug up this morning. And what did I dig up? An old chest, some old coins, a great number of unmounted gems, and some empty gem settings. Nikki, you saw the empty settings. Of which materials were they made?"

"Gold, silver, platinum —"

"Platinum," said Ellery, and he waved his cigarette gently. "The metal platinum wasn't introduced into Europe until about 1750 — *over fifty years after Kidd supposedly buried the chestful of jewels on this island.* It's even worse than that: *Platinum wasn't used for jewel settings until the year 1900*, at which time Kidd had been dead a hundred and ninety-nine years.

"A phony, gentlemen. A plant. The whole thing.

"The 'treasure' I unearthed this morning was buried in that sand very recently, I'm afraid. It has no more connection with William Kidd or any other seventeenth century pirate than the loose change in my pocket. Oh, it was meant to be taken for a treasure Kidd buried — the chest is authentically old, and some old coins were strewn among the jewels. But the jewels, as proved by those platinum settings, are modern.

"Why should modern jewels be buried on an island in the guise of old pirate treasure? Well, suppose they were stolen property. As stolen property, they'd have to be disposed of through fences for a small proportion of their value. But as buried treasure they could be disposed of openly at market prices. Very clever.

"Eric Ericsson, gentlemen, suspected that Anthony Hobbes-Watkins and his 'father,' Colonel Hobbes-Watkins — who's probably not his father at all — were not what they seemed. He was tragically right — they're a pair of European jewel thieves and, from the size of their accumulations, they must hold some sort of record for prowess in their exacting profession.

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"They were cooling off in the Bahamas, wondering how best to turn their loot into cash, when Eric Ericsson and his niece stopped over at New Providence Island for a visit. Hearing the purely mythical yarn about how Kidd had buried treasure on Ericsson's Island two hundred and fifty years ago — treasure that had never been found — these worthies got a remarkably ingenious idea. They would plant the jewels in a real old chest — the Bahamas were the headquarters of the buccaneers and are full of pirate relics; they would salt the stolen jewels with a few authentic old coins; and they would bury the chest on Ericsson's Island, to be 'discovered' by them at a later date. The plan revolved about Inga's infatuation for this fellow here; he pretended to reciprocate her love and he married her. As Ericsson's sole heir, Inga would inherit his entire estate, which included this island, when Ericsson died. And as Inga's husband, Tony Hobbes-Watkins would control it all, and when Inga died — an early and untimely death, eh, gentlemen? — our friends would be in the rosy clear . . . I'm sorry, Inga, but it seems to be a day for crushing blows."

Inga sat pallid and blank, her hand clutching Nikki's.

"If you're trying to pin Ericsson's murder on me —" began the younger man in a swift and nasal voice.

But the Colonel said harshly, "Be quiet."

"Oh, that?" said Ellery. "Let's see. We know that Ericsson's bullet struck his murderer. Yet none of his four possible murderers exhibits a wound. Obviously, the bullet buried itself in a part of the murderer which couldn't be wounded —" Ellery smiled —" *which couldn't be wounded because it's not flesh and blood.* Only one of you four fits that curious specification. The one who uses a wooden leg to compensate for his — *Stop him!*"

And when they had subdued the struggling caretaker and dug Eric Ericsson's bullet out of the pegleg, the police captain — who was glassy-eyed — said, "Then these two men here, Mr. Queen . . . they weren't in on Ericsson's murder . . . ?"

"The whole plot, Captain, was geared to Ericsson's murder," said Ellery with a shrug, "though I'm afraid Long John rather jumped the gun.

"Don't you see that they were all in the plot together? How could our friend the Colonel, when he left the Bahamas after the wedding to smuggle the jewels into the States and get it to Ericsson's Island before the others sailed up to join him — how, I say, could the Colonel have planted the chest on the island unless the caretaker was taken into the gang? Also, the stage had to be set for the 'discovery' of the treasure: a hole bored through the tower room wall to sight on the chosen spot, the wallpaper doctored to implement the mythical clue of 'the needle's eye,' and so on — none of it possible unless

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Long John were declared in. He was, I suppose, to be paid off when Ericsson was disposed of and they got control, through Inga, of the estate and the island.

"What these gentry didn't figure on was the stupidity and avarice of Long John. They're far too clever operators to have planned to kill Ericsson the very night the treasure was located. Even if that had been their plan, they'd hardly have devised such a crude and obvious murder — especially with a trained investigator on the island. An 'accident' would have been more their style. At their leisure, under selected conditions . . . like a storm, say, and an overturned boat . . . perhaps even with Inga a victim of the same accident, in that way gaining their objective in one stroke and with no danger.

"But Long John is simple-minded and, as Ericsson told me, a miser. He just couldn't wait. He heard me leave in the dark, realized my purpose, saw the dawn coming up, and hurried to the tower room to spy on me. He watched me dig the jewels up, probably saw them sparkling in the sun. When Ericsson surprised him in the tower at that very moment, all he could see were those jewels and his share of them when Ericsson should be killed. So Long John killed him — then and there. Speeding up the great day . . .

"Haste makes waste, eh, Colonel? And Tony, I regret to inform you that I'm going to take your wife to the best lawyer in New York and see what can be done about an immediate annulment.

"And now, gentlemen, if you'll remove these pirates," said Ellery to the officers, but looking soberly at Inga, "Nikki and I have some holes to refill."

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